

INDIRA GANDHI
THREE YEARS AS PRIME MINISTER

Indira Gandhi Three Years As Prime Minister

D. N. Kalhan

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There are times in the history of every nation when its will is tested and its future depends on its capacity for resolute action and bold decision. This is such a time in India.

—INDIRA GANDHI

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SYMBOL OF UNITY

WHEN IN JANUARY, 1966, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party many people both in the country and abroad were greatly surprised. Nobody of course was certain who the party would pick on as Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri's successor. Before the election several names were being mentioned. If for some reason the seniormost among the top leaders, Mr. Morarji Desai, was not found acceptable, the choice, it was commonly argued, might fall on Mr. Y. B. Chavan, who had earned a high reputation as Maharashtra's Chief Minister and acquitted himself creditably as the Union Defence Minister. There was also speculation about the chances of Mr. Gulzari Lal Nanda who, after Mr. Shastri's sudden death, had been called upon to act as Prime Minister. Since Mr. Nanda had acted in the same capacity after Mr. Nehru's death and had held No. 2 position in the Cabinet for years, his claim to leadership could have been considered by the party, specially because he was not counted among controversial figures.

But the party worked according to its own design. With no clear choice, Mr. Morarji Desai and Mrs. Indira Gandhi were pitted against each other. It was a keen contest although the two candidates did not seem to be evenly matched. With his long record both as public leader and as administrator Mr. Desai had much to commend himself not only to the party but to the people as well. He was also known to have a formidable following in the Congress Parliamentary Party and outside it. In comparison, Mrs. Gandhi was a newcomer. Besides her close association with her father, she had not had very great experience either of public life or of administration. She had been the Congress President for less than a year and a Cabinet Minister in the Shastri Government for about a year and a half. Her party following was unknown and her public image not too well defined.

Fully conscious of the comparative merits and qualifications of the two candidates, why did the party members

prefer Mrs. Gandhi to Mr. Morarji Desai ? There were many explanations. The most widely accepted was the one based on the party's factional character. The then Congress President, Mr. Kamaraj, secured the support of the party's State sataraps commanding a sizable number of adherents among Members of Parliament and succeeded in defeating Mr. Morarji Desai. It was commonly contended that the party bosses' aversion to Mr. Morarji Desai's dogmatic and dictatorial personality had more to do with Mrs. Gandhi's selection as a candidate and her election than any of her own qualities and qualifications. She was the party bosses' choice because they could exploit her.

It is at no time easy to go into collective motivations. Historians find no difficulty in enumerating factors leading to one prince rather than another succeeding to the throne in some distant past. Few of them can however claim to have convincingly explained why politicians in the modern world seem to be chosen to lead their countries even when they are neither the obvious leaders nor are expected to transform themselves into national heroes. In Mrs. Gandhi's case her family connections were also brought into the argument. She was chosen by the bosses and the party because she was the daughter of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and the granddaughter of Mr. Motilal Nehru.

None of these arguments can be brushed aside. Mrs. Gandhi was by no means the obvious choice as Mr. Shastri's successor. She was also not the best equipped Congress leader, according to many, to take over as Prime Minister when the country had just been through a short but devastating war with a perennially hostile neighbour. The problems facing the people, whether created during the time of her father and accentuated by the 1962 conflict with China or left behind by Mr. Shastri as a result of the weak-kneed policy adopted at Tashkent, were greater than we had faced. In addition, the drought was already upon us.

Why then did the Congress bosses, who cannot be accused either of being altogether without political wisdom or of disregarding their party's interests as well as those of the country, work so determinedly for Mrs. Gandhi's election as against Mr. Morarji Desai ? Not only Mrs. Gandhi's supporters but many others who are neither connected with the Congress nor interested in its internal rivalries have little doubt that the over-

riding consideration with the bosses and the party—and both are supposed to reflect the collective will of the people—was the country's integration and unity.

During Mahatma Gandhi's lifetime there was no dearth of what were known as "all-India" leaders. Anyone of his associates or anyone closely connected with the Congress at high levels was accepted as one of them. Even leaders of the second rank to whatever region they belonged could collect crowds in any part of the country. For instance, Mr. Bhulabhai Desai addressed a huge meeting in the rural heart of what is now West Pakistan. The sturdy Punjabis, mostly Sikhs, found nothing incongruous in a sophisticated Gujarati lawyer talking to them in his stilted Hindustani.

Almost all the true Indians as against regional leaders have passed away. Few among those who consider themselves as national figures are accepted as such by the country. Not even the Union Ministers wielding power and authority can claim or attain recognition as national leaders. Though closely associated with the Congress, they have neither the mental attitudes nor the public following to rise above their regional status.

Mrs. Gandhi is among the last of the all-India leaders not only because of her professed national views but because she is unquestioningly accepted as a person without narrow regional, sectarian and communal loyalties. According to herself, "my whole training has been such that I am unable to see people in compartments. To me an Indian is an Indian. I do not see him as a South Indian or a North Indian, as a Hindu or a Muslim."

In fact, she goes even further. She is often asked, particularly by foreign interviewers, how it feels to be a woman Prime Minister and whether she finds it a handicap or an asset in politics to be a woman. Her stand is unequivocal. She told one questioner in April, 1968: "I do not think a person who is head of government should think in terms of himself or herself as belonging to any group, whether it is sex, religion or caste. If the people accept you as leader of the nation, that is all that matters."

About the same time she told another questioner: "I don't think my being a woman makes any difference at all. It is a question again of putting people in compartments. If you say

that this job is only for a man, that man has certain qualities and capabilities that a woman does not have, then what are these qualities? Physical strength? No, if you are looking for weak points, you can find them in anybody."

It has often been said that Mrs. Indira Gandhi was brought into active politics and systematically groomed for high office by her father. When she was elected President of the Congress in 1959, Mr. Nehru's critics openly said that he had manoeuvred things to push her into that position. Mr. Nehru's influence cannot be denied, but her background and experience were also there to induce the party to elect her as the successor of Mr. U. N. Dhebar whose term as President had not been marked by any spectacular success.

Mr. Dhebar, who had been Chief Minister of the small State of Saurashtra, was chosen to head the party in order to demonstrate the Central leaders' confidence in staunch Congressmen with what has more recently been described as a good reputation. It was also felt that with Mr. Nehru dominating the scene the party should have a President who would not create fresh problems by equating his position with that of the Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. If the experiment did not work it was not because the mild Mr. Dhebar refused to play the role allotted to him but because he found himself ill-fitted for it.

Mrs. Gandhi sailed into Congress Presidentship with complete assurance and made her 11-month term one of the most eventful. Besides helping in solving the question of Bombay's future, she succeeded in ousting Mr. Namboodiripad's Communist Government in Kerala. She went about achieving this far from easy task with a vigour unknown to be associated with her.

Within a couple of months of taking over she made a three-day whirlwind tour of Kerala to see things for herself. Convinced that the State Government's policies were anti-national she prepared a charge-sheet against it. Having taken the whole question of Kerala out of her father's hands, she encouraged the State Congress to start satyagraha against the Communist regime and finally persuaded the President of India to take over the State's administration. Her argument was that "when Kerala is burning it becomes the Centre's duty to go to the aid of the people."

As Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi believes her role is to represent, preserve and promote the unity of India. She endeavours to be above partisanship. "I am a representative of all India, which includes all shades of opinion."

Perhaps that is why the situation in Kerala so greatly agitated her. She was not against the Communist regime as such but did not approve of its policies and methods. "We want the Kerala Government to rule democratically, but they do not. They have said publicly that they do not care about the means to achieve the ends."

What obviously angered her was the inclusion of Mao Tse-tung's writings in textbooks. "I will be prepared to offer my life rather than see that my boys are given anti-national lessons," she said.

She felt so strongly about the conditions in Kerala that she advocated drastic action. "The Constitution is for the people and not the people for the Constitution," she declared. If the Constitution stood in the way of redressing the people's grievances, the Constitution should be changed.

It is of interest that at that time she was afraid of India being drawn into the cold war by China. After her visit to Kerala she complained that "not one Communist voice was heard to say that if China starts a war against India, the Communists would fight for India."

Her role over Kerala in 1959 is not so important as an indication of her ideological attitude as of her capacity to take decisions and to act on them. While shunning dogmatic "isms" she is secular, democratic and Socialistic. This quality too may have counted with members of the Congress Parliamentary Party to vote for her in preference to Mr. Morarji Desai.

There are however other qualifications better known to her associates in the party than to the world outside. As Congress President she tried to revive the party's mass contact programme by touring almost all the States in the country. It was no mere formality, for wherever she went she took measures to revitalize the party at the grass-roots.

But was it her father who pushed her into the party's hierarchy? Was it because of him alone that she was given a responsible position in the party and later, after his death, in the Government? Whenever necessary, she does mention that her

father shared his thoughts and ideas with her. But she did not always agree with him. At the end of 1966 she told an interviewer : "It is impossible for people with definite views not to disagree. I naturally disagreed with my father on many things, although this was more marked when I was younger. Later we came much closer together and he depended a great deal on me and I think he valued my judgment of people and affairs. It is true that because of my many-sided activities and also because I have been meeting a very large number of people daily, I could keep him in touch with the thinking in many parts of the country and of different classes of people".

This was a natural association between an ageing Prime Minister and his politically maturing daughter. But the knowledge of how the government functions did not come to her through Mr. Nehru. She was no doubt the one person with whom Mr. Nehru talked without reserve, specially during the last years of his life. But he did not train her. In her short speech in Hindi on being elected as leader of the party in 1966 she mentioned Mahatma Gandhi, her father and Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri after thanking the members. Then she added : "It was Mr. Shastri and Pandit Pant who brought me into politics after independence and persuaded me to continue in politics even when I wanted to quit."

The reference to Pandit Pant must have come as a surprise to many, for it is not widely known that perhaps more than her father Pandit Pant was her political mentor. She is on record as saying that before joining the Government she knew more about it than many Cabinet Ministers. When she made the remark she did not suggest that her father shared knowledge of State affairs with her. She knew about the inner functioning of the Government from Pandit Pant who not only explained administrative policies and problems to her but kept her informed in detail about current issues.

Thus when she took over as Prime Minister she was neither a stranger to public life nor was she unfamiliar with the mechanics of administration.

AT A DISADVANTAGE

MR. NEHRU BECAME PRIME MINISTER in an atmosphere of turmoil. Transfer of power was arranged in a hurry and the country was divided into two to prevent virtual civil war. But killings, arson and loot were going on, particularly in Punjab where whole populations had to migrate from one area to another. With the departure of the British and Muslims who opted for Pakistan the armed forces as well as the civil services were disorganized. More than 600 princely States posed their own problem.

The difficulties were colossal, but neither the people nor the leaders who took over the Government were in any way down-hearted. The people had faith in themselves as well as their leaders. In the dawn of freedom everything was full of hope and promise, and whether because of the leaders' guidance or the people's efforts, the initial difficulties were soon overcome and it was years later, when popular enthusiasm had died down and the leaders no longer looked larger than life, that a sense of discontent and frustration began to grow.

After Mr. Nehru's death when Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri was elected leader without an actual contest there was a general feeling of relief that the succession was so smooth and that the party's unity had not been impaired. Being a contrast to Mr. Nehru, the new Prime Minister was warmly welcomed as a man of the people, a true representative of the common man. His tenure, however, was so short and ended in such dramatic and tragic circumstances following the conflict with Pakistan that his handling of the country's problems was hardly ever judged.

But when Mrs. Gandhi was chosen to succeed Mr. Shastri she had to fight a stiff contest against one of the party's stalwarts commanding a large following and with an impressive record as a freedom fighter, public figure and administrator. Mr. Morarji Desai also enjoyed the reputation of being a strong man with an inflexible will to get things through.

As a section of opinion claimed, Mr. Shastri had already been chosen by Mr. Nehru to succeed him. Mr. Nehru had picked on him alone among those eased out of office under the

Kamaraj Plan to rejoin his Cabinet and directly to assist him in his work. But Mrs. Gandhi had no such advantage. As the Minister for Information and Broadcasting in the Shastri Cabinet, she had no special status and was perhaps not even very close to the Prime Minister, who was known to keep his own counsel and to take his own decisions.

It is true that she had the advantage of being Mr. Nehru's daughter, but was that a very real advantage? Had not critics talked of a dynasty being created when Mrs. Gandhi was elected Congress President? Moreover, there certainly were doubts in the minds of many about making a woman—younger than many of her Cabinet colleagues—the Prime Minister of a vast country at a time when it was faced with almost insuperable difficulties.

It is well known that the party's choice did not enthuse everyone. The tradition-bound, thoroughly convinced that a woman's sphere should never extend beyond the home, held up their hands in horror and talked of impending doom. Clever politicians within the party and outside began to work out ways of engineering her downfall soon—sooner than later. "How long do you give her?" was a common question irrespective of who asked it and of whom it was asked.

Mrs. Gandhi had almost everything against her. There was the stark situation in the country brought about by the Indo-Pak war because she appeared on the scene at a moment of complete anti-climax. The economy was disorganized both by the war and by the fact that the major countries giving us aid had decided to freeze it. None of the problems left over by Mr. Nehru and inherited by Mr. Shastri had been solved. On top of it all within months of her becoming Prime Minister it was found that we were having a severe drought.

No Prime Minister, not even the greatest of them, could have claimed to have the capacity to solve the gigantic problems facing the country, and Mrs. Gandhi laid no such claim. Though she vigorously denies that she has either advantages or disadvantages in being a woman, she acted as a woman, a woman of dignity and composure, using nothing beyond her womanly courage and homely commonsense.

Knowing the state we were in she did not go about swishing the big broom. As might have been expected of almost any-

one in her position, she made mistakes and she fumbled. She chose some advisers who were soon found to be unreliable guides. She allowed herself to be pushed into devaluing the rupee, although even her sternest critics admit that she had little choice in view of the external pressures. She gave a very uneven performance as a speaker in Parliament and on formal occasions outside. By surrounding herself with persons believed to be no more than her courtiers and hangers-on she became the target of critics who described her associates as her "Kitchen Cabinet".

However, through all this she did not allow herself to be discouraged or disheartened. Her public image, at least in the Capital, was far from enviable, but when she herself appeared in public, even among her sharpest critics she was never unnerved.

PARTY AND IDEOLOGY!

WHETHER BECAUSE OF HISTORICAL REASONS or because of its heterogeneous character the Congress has never accepted Socialism as a clear aim. Mr. Nehru, who was largely responsible for defining the party's ideology, was essentially a romantic Socialist. The Russian Revolution having made such an impact on him in his younger days he could not go along with the Gandhian concept of trusteeship. Nor did he want the country's economy to drift. In the circumstances he found himself, he pushed his own ideas of Socialism as far as he could. He no doubt compromised when he agreed that his party's goal was not Socialism but to create a Socialistic pattern of society.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi does not go even as far as her father. While his party colleagues avoided the subject, he often talked of Socialism. Mrs. Gandhi has to be provoked to state her position. She does not deny her faith in Socialism but she is always careful to emphasize what the term means or does not mean. According to her, any sincere programme to serve the people has necessarily to be Socialistic. But after this general statement she makes her own qualifications.

"By this we do not mean any textbook definition of Socialism or any preconceived theory, but that we should evolve a direction suited to the needs of the Indian people.

"No mere 'ism' will help, not even pragmatism. In everything we do, we must ask two questions : Does it enlarge or narrow the inequalities in our society ? Does it make us more self-reliant or less ?"

It is easy to understand why she has no faith in dogma. Unlike her father, who did not have to worry either about his party's position in the country or his own position in the party, she has to keep in view the radically changed situation. Since the Congress is no longer in power in many of the States, acceptance of its ideology by the country as a whole can hardly be taken for granted. As to the party, ideologically it is perhaps no different from what it was during Mr. Nehru's time. It continues to represent many shades of opinion from the extreme right

to almost the extreme left. But it is neither united nor disciplined. Perhaps there has never been so such in-fighting on a personal basis as there is today. Fully aware of the situation, Mrs. Gandhi has adopted a policy of flexibility.

She may not have made any spectacular break with the past, but she has openly declared again and again that she is prepared for a change if a change is necessary.

On May 23, 1966, within months of taking over as Prime Minister, she made a fighting speech at the A.I.C.C. session. The passage quoted below is of special significance because it very clearly points the way she wants to go. Seldom do her critics or even her supporters give her credit for independence. Even her most categorical public statements on her capacity to take quick decisions and strike out on her own are largely ignored perhaps because she does not care to elaborate on them or to repeat them.

But at the A.I.C.C. she was neither laconic nor diffident. She declared :

"I may be excused for saying that I have all along been associated with my father, Shri Nehru, in framing various national policies during his lifetime. His approach has been inculcated in my mind. The persons who used to oppose him during his lifetime now intend to explain his policies to me ! Is not this very surprising ! I have been adhering to his policies, but am prepared to deviate from them if the interests of the nation call for it. But I am sure this is not an opportune moment for that. *There seems to be no other way by which the pace of the country's progress can be accelerated.* I shall stick to only that policy which I consider to be in the best interests of our people.

"If you do not want me to continue in my post, you may remove me. I am certainly grateful for the honour bestowed upon me, but I may tell you quite frankly that I do not crave to continue as Prime Minister. I feel that if I resort to pleasing people by way of dittoing their convictions, it would be in sheer disregard of my father, because I have been trained on certain lines and I shall ever stick to them."

Besides being its leader, the Prime Minister is the party's symbol and in a way its image-maker. If Mr. Nehru won many votes with his concern for the common man and his talk of Socialism, he also lost many among groups and sections in dis-

agreement with his ideas. It was rarely however that he chided the party for its failings. He was so sure of maintaining his position through his own influence that he did not generally have to defend himself against criticism from within. Mrs. Gandhi cannot be said to enjoy the same self-assurance. She is not the party's uncontested leader. There are older, more experienced persons around her. It is therefore not a little surprising that, in spite of her position in the party and her Government's weak hold on the country, she speaks out whenever she wishes to.

The 1966 A.I.C.C. session was one such occasion. She was far from apologetic when defending her policies. But she did not stop there. She took the party squarely to task.

Answering criticism on planning she indicted the party in clear terms : "Steps should be taken to remove the shortcomings experienced in earlier Plans. We have to be very cautious in this regard lest we commit irreparable mistakes. I don't mean that by this approach the Government means to wash its hands of all responsibility. However, the party also owes some responsibility. I may submit humbly that the party has not contributed its due share in this regard. It is only the party, and not the Government, that can propagate national policies.

"The party alone can channelize public forces. The party has not been able to bring about the social revolution which the country needs. Due to this, the Government is left alone to implement our Plans, and our needs are so extensive that very little success is achieved.

"If people say that the Government has certain defects, they may well be asked what they think of the Congress Party ?

"The public is pointing out the same defects in the Congress Party as the latter is pointing out in the Government. It is often remarked that the Congress Party does not look to the interests of the masses. If the party had gone hand in hand with the Government in the execution of various programmes, the face of India would have been quite different."

"Very harsh words, and it is doubtful if many other leaders would have dared to address the party in this manner at a time when she was under attack because the country's economy was in the doldrums."

HARD DECISIONS

UNTIL SHE WAS IN HER THIRD YEAR in office when reports of a bumper crop brought cheer to the people Mrs. Gandhi was beset by serious problems. According to her, 'if we are cautious in our approach we might have fewer problems, but we would also solve fewer problems'. She therefore decided to eliminate many of those she faced.

The Punjabi Suba issue had been there for years vitiating the State's atmosphere and creating political crises from time to time. There were not a few reasons why the Akali demand for the creation of a new State should not be entertained. Mr. Nehru had all along been opposed to it and Sardar Partap Singh Kairon had spent much of his resourcefulness and energies as Punjab's Chief Minister to fight the Akalis. In spite of the mounting pressure, Mrs. Gandhi too could have found ways of rejecting or by-passing the demand. Her Government however decided to settle the issue once and for all. The whole area was reorganized. Himachal Pradesh was expanded; Punjab's boundaries shrank and the new State of Haryana was brought into being.

Whatever the other consequences, the creation of Punjabi Suba relieved tension between Hindus and Sikhs. The Akalis and the supporters of the Jana Sangh, who had all along been in warring camps, suddenly found that they had common interests and promptly joined hands to form a coalition Ministry at the first opportunity. Truncated though it was, the State of Punjab under the United Front Government, with the Akalis and the Jana Sangh as its twin pillars, presented so heartening a picture that the Akali Chief Minister, Mr. Gurnam Singh, could not help boasting about unprecedented Hindu-Sikh amity. He also took pride in the fact that the dimensions of the law and order problem had been measurably reduced even where ordinary crime was concerned.

What subsequently followed in the sphere of party politics need not concern us here. But it is not without significance that on the eve of the mid-term poll early in 1969, after the ten-

month interlude during which a breakaway group under Mr. Lachhman Singh Gill had had full sway, the Akalis and the Jana Sangh were once again drawn together.

Those who were dead set against the formation of a State on a communal basis even though it was being demanded in the name of linguistic homogeneity could never have envisaged that geographical division might lead to emotional and political unity among the two major communities in the area.

Mrs. Gandhi however denies any credit for the Punjabi Suba decision. When asked about it she told me that the decision had already been all but taken before she took over as Prime Minister. She explained that during Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri's time a Parliamentary committee was appointed to go into the problem. The committee's chairman was the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. Hukum Singh.

"It submitted its report just 24 hours after Shastriji passed away," she said. "Now once a committee of this kind takes a decision it is practically impossible to go back on it."

Moreover, an explosive situation existed in Punjab and the plan to reorganize the region was announced without delay. Mrs. Gandhi thus may not have directly influenced the decision, but in the public mind it is associated with her Prime Ministership and there is a general feeling that someone else in her place could have acted differently.

In any case Mrs. Gandhi accepts her part in settling the equally tangled and equally long-standing issue of Assam's reorganization. But because of the delay in coming to a decision, there were reports about a rift in the Cabinet which could not be ignored. Apart from circumstantial evidence, what were claimed to be the actual words of important Ministers were quoted to suggest fundamental differences and the Prime Minister was severely criticized for not being strong enough to deal with problems in a firm and decisive manner.

Questioned about it, Mrs. Gandhi said that her critics did not always appreciate the working of the Government. They always looked at things as black and white and saw nothing in between.

"Sometimes decisions take time because all the aspects of a problem have to be considered. Sometimes decisions have to be changed to suit particular circumstances and when the

situation is likely to change. Everything is not simple. But when there is an emergency we have to act quickly. We had to buy so much food from outside because we had famine conditions. We had simply to buy, but even that by itself has created a chain of consequences."

Replying to Mr. J. R. D. Tata's specific charges of delay and indecision Mrs. Gandhi told me : "Naturally he would say all that. Those in the private sector feel that they should be on commanding heights. When they think they have a good proposition they feel that all that the Government has to do is to say 'yes'.

"But we have to ask ourselves whether any project is in the national interest or not. Even when you feel something is worth trying you have to consider it. That takes time. If there is delay it may be because the other side concerned is just not responsive in supplying the information required."

She went on to explain how delays take place. "Many measures have been taken and I think that the areas of delay have been lessened. You see the whole system is such; we had to carry on with the old British system, which was for a particular purpose and it rarely meets with our needs of quick development, production and so on. Suppose, there is a project report. One Ministry looks into this and comes to a decision and it goes to another Ministry, which is also concerned. It takes so long as one thing has to pass through many hands. You cannot eliminate any of them for it does need the co-operation of those people and they have to provide something for it. What we need is better co-ordination. Many things are moving faster, but things do get stuck sometimes, which is quite unavoidable, and have to be sorted out before other things can be sanctioned."

To illustrate the point, she mentioned what she had said a few days earlier at her Press conference on January 1, 1969. "Just about a week ago, an all-party deputation came from Mysore to complain about a project which had not been sanctioned for a long time. There was a vague recollection that this had been passed. As soon as they went I found that the Government sanction was sent months ago and there was absolutely nothing on the part of the Government to do. But a private party was involved. Either he had backed out or he could not raise the requisite resources, or something like

that. But the general public do not know anything about it. They feel that the Government must be at fault.”

There are three questions on which her personal attitude is widely known to have been a decisive factor. The first was the Congress Party's sponsorship of Dr. Zakir Husain's candidature for India's Presidentship. Long before Dr. Radhakrishnan's term expired speculation had started about the choice of his successor, although one section of opinion was in favour of electing him for another term. The argument was that, since Dr. Zakir Husain's claim could not be ignored and he would not care to continue to be Vice-President under a new President, Dr. Radhakrishnan should continue in office. There was however Dr. Radhakrishnan's health to be taken into account and maybe because of this consideration the party began to look for a successor. Not a few in the Congress had serious misgivings about Dr. Zakir Husain standing for Presidentship. Whatever their other reasons, they contended that the party could not risk a defeat in this vital election and with Dr. Zakir Husain as the party candidate there was no knowing what even the limited electorate might decide.

The situation became even worse after the general election. For the first time since independence the Congress lost its dominance in several of the States and found its majority in Parliament substantially reduced. At the same time Opposition parties introduced a new factor in the discussion. With the Congress no longer ruling in all the States, they pointed out, the country should have a non-party man as President. The head of State should have no narrow party loyalties, for in the changed circumstances he might be called upon to arbitrate between the Centre with a Government belonging to one party and a State ruled by another.

But from all accounts Mrs. Gandhi's mind was made up. She wanted Dr. Zakir Husain to be the Congress candidate and the party to support him. This was no mere personal preference. The very principle of secularism was involved. Just because Dr. Zakir Husain did not belong to a particular community he could not be disqualified for Presidentship.

The Opposition parties were in no way reconciled. To ensure the widest possible support they persuaded the Chief Justice of India to resign his post and contest the election as



Being sworn-in as Prime Minister.



Coming out of an Army bunker in a border area.

their candidate. Meanwhile, those basically opposed to the very idea of a Muslim becoming head of State made personal attacks on Dr. Zakir Husain. Some of the charges could be described as calculated to arouse communal passions.

Fortunately, however, the campaigning on the whole was dignified. There is little doubt that the restricted nature of the electorate helped the parties to keep themselves under restraint.

Dr. Zakir Husain's election was not only a personal triumph for the Prime Minister but also a big step towards the acceptance of the secular idea in practice. More recently Mrs. Gandhi has tried to give another push to secularism by reviving and revitalizing the National Integration Council. Incidentally the Council's meeting in Srinagar was also evidence of the opposition party leaders' willingness to accept Mrs. Gandhi's leadership, for she not only presided over a gathering of the country's top political and other figures but was the only one to address the inaugural session at which newsmen and the public were present.

Neither her father, except during his last years, nor Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri had either to justify his policies and actions before the Congress Parliamentary Party and the A.I.C.C. or to defend them in Parliament in the same manner as Mrs. Gandhi has to. Until 1962 Mr. Nehru's decisions were hardly ever questioned and Mr. Shastri enjoyed a great deal of indulgence. But Mrs. Gandhi has to be constantly on the alert about criticism from both within the party and from outside.

Following the policy laid down by her father the Prime Minister took a firmly pro-Arab line over the short clash between the U.A.R. and Israel in June, 1967. There was a furore over the issue. Why must India be so openly partisan? There was a sustained attack against the Government's attitude. Mrs. Gandhi however was unmoved. Since Mr. Nehru's time India's refusal to have full diplomatic relations with Israel has been criticized. But those agitated over this limited aspect of the country's foreign policy are equally critical about our failure, in other fields, to give top priority to national interests in our international dealings. If Mrs. Gandhi has been as decisive as her father in continuing to maintain the friendliest of relations with the Arab world, it is not because of emotional considerations or personal prejudices but because, like Mr. Nehru, she

realizes that our national interest is best served by pursuing this policy. She did not allow herself to be shaken over the issue and was not overwhelmed by the flood of criticism from certain quarters for the simple reason that she is convinced that Indo-Arab amity and co-operation are essential for us politically as well as economically.

There were similar tests for the Prime Minister when the Kutch Award was announced, when troops of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries entered Czechoslovakia and when reports of Soviet arms aid to Pakistan were confirmed. The Government's stand on all three issues was sharply criticised both within and outside Parliament. On India's failure strongly to condemn Soviet action in Czechoslovakia, a Cabinet Minister, Mr. Asoka Mehta, resigned and a former Minister, Dr. Sushila Nayyar, voted against the Government in Parliament. Mrs. Gandhi was not unduly disturbed either by the Opposition clamour for a change in the Government's policy towards the Soviet Union or by her own party members' protests. By patiently explaining that the Government was acting in national interest she carried a majority of the party with her and on the basis of this strength weathered all the storms in Parliament.

How does Mrs. Gandhi manage to persuade her party members to support even widely unpopular decisions and policies? Her Cabinet colleagues do not always see eye to eye with her. Quite a few Congress M.P.s are also not of her way of thinking, whether because of ideological differences or group loyalties. But whenever there is a crisis the Prime Minister succeeds in having her own way.

The explanation, according to a prominent Congress M.P., lies in the fact that Mrs. Gandhi enjoys the complete confidence of most members of the Parliamentary Party. Many of them are younger than she is and others have found her to be a reliable guide. "Take me", for instance, said the M.P. "I am not a supporter of the Prime Minister for mere convenience. I am with her because I have full faith in her. When I have doubts I can go to her and frankly express them. She listens to all of us and is always prepared to consider points of view other than her own."

Said another young supporter among Congress M.P.s: "I am neither a Rightist nor a Leftist. Because I believe in the

Congress I also believe in Mrs. Gandhi. She does not impose policies on us. She explains them to us and discusses them with us. She is fair-minded and approachable and has the capacity to win co-workers' respect and loyalty."

Her critics within the party, say her supporters, are largely those who have set ideas developed in an earlier era. They have failed to realize that since the general election of 1967 the country is no longer what it was and that neither the ruling party nor the Government can continue to conduct itself as it used to. They do not appear to have taken the voters' verdict to heart.

Her supporters' attitude to Mrs. Gandhi makes it clear that she is in a strong enough position within the party to be able to take decisions and to stick by them. But she is neither rash nor rigid. To her loyal followers she is no national heroine, no torch-bearing crusader, but they do believe that one of the ironies of Mrs. Gandhi's term as Prime Minister has been that she has always been blamed for her Government's shortcomings but has seldom been given credit for doing the right thing in the right way.

It has been said of her that she has an extraordinarily quick mind and acts ruthlessly once she is convinced of the rightness of a course of action. But at the same time she stands for the basic concept of democracy. She solves problems "through sympathy, through the largest measure of consent, through anticipation and psychological preparation. Her approach has always been to find areas of agreement and then enlarge them. Her mind is not governed by precedent but by possibilities, not by dogmatism and laying down the rule but by 'taking the people with you.'"

To this opinion may be added the fact that she has not developed this approach to problems as Prime Minister but had already worked it out for herself during Mr. Nehru's time. When the Kashmir question was being widely discussed after Sheikh Abdullah's release Mrs. Gandhi is known to have advised her father against doing anything that might not be acceptable to the country. She did not want him to go against public opinion, not to run against the current.

TOWARDS SUPREMACY

WITHIN THE CONFINES OF HER SPHERE as Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi has undoubtedly been holding her own. Outside too she is fast establishing herself as the party's supreme leader. Before the 1967 general election she toured many parts of the country to campaign for the party. She travelled 15,200 miles and addressed 160 meetings. For the mid-term elections in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and West Bengal in 1969, she started her tours long before any other prominent leaders were astir. She went specially to the rural areas where she is not only warmly welcomed but finds no difficulty in establishing a rapport with her audiences.

Someone who has worked with her and watched her closely gives his views as follows : "While she has a subtle understanding of the national and international forces and trends, she is not a theoretician constructing elaborate intellectual explanations for her actions. To know the nature of her influence one has to watch and hear her addressing rural audiences. Her impact is similar to that of Mr. Nehru; the words come from the depth of heart and mind; there is no effort at oratory; there is instant communication and no suggestion of any bluff or condescension. The most complicated matters are discussed on a footing of equality between speaker and audience."

To prove his point this observer gives examples of the effortless comprehension she provides among rural audiences. "Many people ask why Pakistan seems to have more friends than India. Mrs. Gandhi says a smaller country has more sympathizers than a larger one. Again, some ask why India seems to have fewer friends now than before. The answer : 'We had more friends when we were weak; but now India is growing stronger and the great Powers see India as it could be and will be'."

With electioneering fresh in her mind, as she had only the previous day made a dash to Amritsar to campaign for the Congress, Mrs. Gandhi corroborated this opinion. Asked about her reaction to her election tours, she said she had always attracted enormous crowds. "Before I was Prime Minister little

publicity was given to my election tours. Today they are publicized. But I have never had to complain about attendance at meetings I address. Kerala and Punjab are the two areas where I always have enormous crowds."

That was mass response. What about the criticism of her election speeches? Had the Congress to offer nothing but stable governments in the States?

Stability, she explained, was important, because there could be no economic development without it. "Our main goal is economic progress, and this depends on stability. That is why I lay so much stress on stability."

"Suppose, the government in a State changes every day. What is that State going to do? Nothing can be done. Stability in my view is the absolute first thing we should have today. Stability is the one base on which you have to work for economic progress."

Q.: Would you go in for stability even with the help of other, smaller, parties if the Congress is not returned in a majority in any State?

A.: That I would not say now because it will depend on the situation then. It is also a question of policy. We cannot go against our policy.

These are the views of a mature and self-assured leader. But of late political commentators, including those not ideologically or otherwise opposed to her, have been suggesting that even though she has so far succeeded in foiling the attempts of groups and combinations of groups to topple her Government, she will have to face new challenges unless she transforms the existing set-up and revises her policy of delays and inaction. The main charge against her is that in order to maintain herself in power she has allowed the Centre's authority to be whittled down, made the Government dependent on the bureaucracy, alienated sections of the Opposition on whose support she could earlier rely when attacked by some sections of her own party and generally created a situation in which neither she nor her Government can effectively bring about political and social changes. Spending most of her energies and her great skill as a politician to ward off threats to her position, she has permitted the party as well as the Government to lose all sense of purpose.

Such criticism, unflattering though it is both to herself and

to politicians and officials on whom she leans, is in no way irksome to Mrs. Gandhi. "I do not mind being attacked", she says. "I consider it a challenge. If I think I am doing right, I do not care what other people say and I cannot be influenced by criticism when I am convinced."

As a personal attitude, it is no doubt very commendable. But has Mrs. Gandhi been giving thought to the vital question of utilizing her leadership and the administration as instruments for directing the country towards progress? Her public speeches and declarations cannot be of help here. There has to be evidence to prove that she has not been following a policy of drift and of compromise and that if she has so far failed to act boldly to assert her authority it was not because of fear of losing her position but because more important national considerations weighed with her.

As to the Government, she has for the first time since independence organized its various wings as functional units. Cabinet meetings are regular and all issues are discussed and settled by the team as a whole. Nobody ever questioned Mr. Nehru, and Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri did not care to be questioned. Mrs. Gandhi however is punctilious about her relations with her colleagues and the full Cabinet as well as its committees are given all the opportunities to thrash out problems in detail.

As in the case of the Cabinet, committees at Secretaries' level have also been streamlined. They function in a systematic manner in an advisory capacity. It cannot, however, be denied that not only Secretaries—the Ministers' top advisers—but officials as such have been growing more and more powerful over the years. For one thing some Ministers have left too much in their hands since they themselves are not always keen to be involved in the drudgery of file work or in the debates over sharply controversial issues. Not unnaturally the Secretaries and other bureaucrats lower down take advantage of such Ministers. Wherever and whenever they can, they decide even major issues instead of merely guiding their political heads.

Whether the main reason why the bureaucracy is in a dominant position, is the senior officials' assertiveness, the poor calibre of Ministers or the result of the sequence of events over the years, the Prime Minister cannot absolve herself of all blame. There was nothing to prevent her

going in for a thorough overhaul of the system, at least at the highest level, after she had seen the working of the governmental machinery. It is true that she has made some attempts to pay attention to suitability and merit when selecting officials for important posts, but either because of lack of persistence or because of opposition from powerful bureaucratic lobbies, not much headway has been made towards meaningful and effective reorganization.

Mishandling of large public sector projects and enterprises and the serious lapses of civil servants selected to look after them have not gone unnoticed. The Prime Minister is known to be seriously concerned about finding the right type of personnel for public sector enterprises which are sure to grow in numbers in the successive Plans. What practical steps are taken to attract top quality managerial talent to them is yet to be seen. The situation may be easier in the future when the products of the Institutes of Technology and of the school of management set up during recent years have gained adequate experience. But for the moment, the Government will have to depend on senior officials and the tried ability of people in the private sector some of whom have already been drafted to run public enterprises.

During her campaign for the mid-term poll Mrs. Gandhi declared in Calcutta that if she found the Congress going in the wrong direction she would not hesitate to leave it. She, however, added that the Congress was still in good health and there was therefore no question of her leaving it at this stage.

No leader can look for loyalty from followers without being equally loyal. Mrs. Gandhi had therefore no choice but to praise her own party. But she was stretching a point when she claimed the Congress to be in good health. The organization with its vast network of branches from the village level upwards is no doubt intact and with the resources available to them its leaders find no difficulty in gathering impressive support at election time. But they can no longer represent the party as wedded to ideals or principles. They cannot defend it when it is charged with opportunism and lack of faith in any of its professed policies.

The only redeeming feature is that the Congress as a whole is still expected to maintain a code of conduct. Many of its

leaders have committed flagrant breaches of the accepted code and many others may have left it out of frustration and in search of power outside it. The attitudes and motivations of many of those in control of it at different levels are also known to be far from high-minded or even public-spirited. But so far the public at large has clung to the belief that the Congress has a special status among political parties. That is why lapses on its part receive greater attention, and large sections of the country's Press, though in no way its supporters, never go to the extent of writing it off as a decadent body going the way of other parties. There is regret rather than outright condemnation in newspaper comments on the party's misdeeds and failures and the hope is always expressed that it will improve its behaviour and rectify its mistakes.

This indulgence on the part of the public or the Press cannot be expected to last much longer mainly because the Congress has lately been tending to become a little too cynical of public opinion. Those who have seen any revolution from inside have almost invariably described its leaders to have been utterly disdainful both of public opinion and of their followers. The harder and more violent the struggle the greater is the cynicism of people conducting it. Congress leaders too could act with complete disregard of the public as long as they were engaged in the fight for freedom. But most of the leaders of today have known no struggle and are waging none except for the survival and supremacy of their own groups and factions. Their disdain for the public is therefore not without its dangers to their own position as well as to that of their party.

Days before Mrs. Gandhi set out for her electioneering tour at the end of 1968 the party's Central Election Committee made some strange bargains during the selection of candidates for the mid-term poll. One of the most widely criticized was that relating to some Uttar Pradesh politicians who had helped the State Congress to pull down the United Front Ministry headed by Mr. Charan Singh. They had earlier defected from the Congress along with Mr. Charan Singh, and when they agreed to defect from him, the leader of the U.P. Congress Legislature Party, Mr. C. B. Gupta, promised to treat them as "clean" Congressmen. True to his promise, Mr. Gupta, who had insisted on his inclusion in the Central Election Committee, demanded that

members of this group of his special supporters must be allowed to fight the mid-term election on the Congress ticket.

The committee was in a dilemma. Earlier, in the Haryana mid-term election the Congress had refused to name faction leaders and defectors as the party's candidates. In dealing with Bihar it had once again laid down the same rule. How could the party's top screening body now decide on a reversal of its policy? Mr. Gupta, on the other hand, was unrelenting. He must redeem his pledge however unedifying the circumstances in which it was given and whatever the consequences for the party.

A novel solution was found. It was agreed that, instead of the defectors, their wives should stand as Congress candidates. Had this happened at the village panchayat level to settle a trivial local dispute deliberately in a non-serious, if not farcical manner, the episode would have been a source of amusement. It could have been cited as an example of the village elders' rugged common sense and good humour. But could a national organization with its enviable record both as the spearhead of a mass movement and as the party which remained undefeated all over the country in three general elections bring itself down to the level of a rural elders' conclave?

This may be the general reaction to the decision but Mrs. Gandhi did not find anything unusual in the arrangement "It is being commonly said", I told her, "that these ridiculous things are happening because your guidance is not strong enough and the party is not united enough."

Mrs. Gandhi was in no way disturbed. Her reply was: "You may think that it is a ridiculous thing to ask for tickets for wives; but in politics this kind of thing happens even in the United States. They have had Mrs. Wallace as the Governor of the State of Alabama. In the U.S.A. a Governor's job is not a sitting job; it is an administrator's job; he is the head of the government. It is part of politics everywhere."

The reference here is to Mrs. George Wallace. After completing two terms as the Governor of Alabama, Mr. Wallace put up his wife as a candidate because under the constitution he himself could not stand for a third term and she was elected. The criticism against Mr. Wallace was that he got his wife elected to be able to continue to wield power himself.

Mrs. Gandhi added : "To some extent I think rather an extraordinary situation was created in U.P. because many of the people who left the Congress—some certainly left it for personal gain or hope of Ministership or something—merely because of personal troubles, and so they are not less of Congressmen than they were when they left unless of course they took to some other policy. To some who left the Congress in U.P. we did not give the ticket and I think rightly. But the case of others who joined the party immediately was different. Some other factors had also to be considered."

Q. : What about the general conduct of the party ?

A. : How about the general conduct of other parties ? The Congress was born in a particular atmosphere and functions in a particular atmosphere. There may be differences because it is not so easy for the older people to adapt themselves to changing conditions. This is the only difficulty.

I do not think the Congress has done anything wrong. All that has happened is that it has not adjusted itself fully to the younger generation and to changing situations.

Q. : Many people say that while you are a great asset to the Congress, the Congress is no asset to you. Do you accept that position ?

A. : No, I do not. I do not think it is true that anybody can do anything without a good organization.

MANY CHALLENGES

WHILE STEADILY STRENGTHENING HER POSITION, Mrs. Gandhi cannot be unaware of the challenges she has to face, most of which come from within the Congress Party. Though unsparing in their attacks, Opposition critics are not interested in the Congress party's internal affairs. Unlike the late Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, who seemed to relish denigrating her and her father more than anything else and preferred even chaos to the Congress, Opposition parties are not allergic to Mrs. Gandhi. They attack the Congress Government's policies. But despite her frequent and bland denials, influential groups within the party are not always with her. Those of the Right persuasion try to resist her official policies whenever they happen to be even mildly progressive. And of course they do not want her to have a free hand within the party.

Mrs. Gandhi is committed to Socialism of her own definition. The Rightists, on the other hand, would be happy if all talk of Socialism of any variety were to end. Some of them openly and others through broad hints have made it known that they are in the party not to fight, campaign and work for its professedly radical economic policies but to ensure the transformation of the Congress into a party of the Right fully committed to a programme not very different from the basic economic tenets of the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh.

These are the men who for decades have collected funds for the party and used them to influence the selection of party candidates for elections. Nobody has ever been able to establish whether electoral victories for the Congress in the past were the direct outcome of the bargains made with those parting with money. Even today there is no detailed and systematic accounting for the money the party collects and spends. The law regulating companies' donations to political parties has yet to be passed.

Where does Mrs. Gandhi stand in all this? Many believe that she has proved to the satisfaction of all—not excluding foreign observers—that she is an extremely astute politician with

an instinct to decide on the right step at the right time. But her detractors within the party continue to be restive. They seem to have built mental or psychological barriers against her. As simplified by herself, the problem is one of adjustment. It is not easy for men who have enjoyed leadership and power for long years and even now have steadfast supporters belonging to their generation or their way of thinking to accept her as their leader.

Since she is no Nehru or Patel and is younger than either of them was when associated with the country's governance, she does not "evoke instant obedience". Many of those expected to give her recognition are older not only in age but in their active association with the Congress. Some of these party men—whether mentally enslaved by tradition, by their own background, by the political norms of a past age or by the pattern of work they have been used to—do not hold her age alone to be against her. They question her political experience and bring in her failure to lean on her "elders".

They sternly frown upon her hob-nobbing with younger people who are strictly not in line in the Congress hierarchy. They also resent what may vaguely be called her modernism. There are some among them who clothe their utter lack of objectivity and realism by merely stating that she being a woman cannot be accepted or recognized as a leader.

One of these not so rare specimens—a labour leader, a forward-looking political patron of enterprising industrialists and a devotee of the parliamentary system of government—had to quote the 3,000-year-old Mahabharata to sustain his superstition that a regime under a woman is inevitably doomed.

"I am quoting Bhishma," he said to underline the purport of using the sonorous Sanskrit words.

"No. No woman can lead us to progress and development. What do those who carry red roses to her every morning say to her? Do they discuss high policies? All that happens is that a few trivial remarks are exchanged. How can a woman run a country?"

This was a man in dead earnest. He was not like the Jana Sangh detractor who brought the Delhi Administration's functioning into utter disrepute by saying "Indira tere shasan men, mitti bhari hai ration men." (Under your rule, Indira, the

rationed food we get is full of dust.)

The slogan-maker was not exaggerating, even though Mrs. Gandhi was not directly to blame for the corruption and inefficiency of the notoriously corrupt and inefficient administration in the Union Territory of Delhi.

Other charges are also levelled at Mrs. Gandhi's door. She did not spare any effort in ousting a Communist Government in Kerala when she was Congress President. Why is she so tolerant one today? Is it because the Congress is no longer in control of all the States or because she has to accept direct responsibility for what she does?

Mrs. Gandhi has an answer. I told her that she was on record as saying that Centre-State relations should be based on democracy and the Constitution and asked whether she was satisfied that a situation similar to that in 1959 did not exist in Kerala.

Her reply was: *"It is not a similar situation. In 1959 there was a continuous movement from all sides and the Chief Minister himself, maybe in a weak moment, said that it was impossible to control it. I do not remember the exact words, but something was said to the effect that the administration had broken down. Nothing like this has happened now. The situation has to be reviewed from many aspects and also from the longterm aspect."*

Q.: Is it because the situation is political and affects Central-State relations as such?

A.: No, except that the breakdown of law and order is not confined to any place in the world or to India. That may be a contributory factor. Many of the organized sections, whether students or workers, are today very much more active and aggressive. There are other political factors. It is a mixture of many kinds of things.

With all the criticism and the many day-to-day pressures from all sides Mrs. Gandhi has not lost sight of national priorities. According to her, economic progress must receive attention before anything else. "But", she said "it is linked with other problems."

"Take communalism," she explained. "If there is communal disharmony you cannot get on with any economic plan. If one starts factories, their future is not known. If the base is

not sound, if there is no unity and communal harmony, everything else becomes impossible.

Q. : There is a new problem which has been created by prosperity among the farmers of Punjab. It is said that there is so much money in the hands of farmers that out of about Rs. 7 crores, about a crore and half or more has gone into wasteful expenditure on consumer goods, transistors, cars.....

A. : Why do you call it wasteful expenditure ? This is the same old thing. Some people even though they are very poor spend a great deal when they go to a fair. Human beings must have an outlet. You can't say because you never had anything you should not have it now. For instance, when free health service was started in Britain, in the first year, everyone decided to go to a doctor to show his pulse, to have new teeth, and this and that. We have, of course, to try and see that money is properly channelized and people also have entertainment. We also have to ensure that extra money is ploughed back into the economy for greater prosperity.

Q. : There is about Rs. 4 crores waiting to be invested.

A. : We should have better banking facilities. This is something which our business men should know about and see what the farmer really wants. For instance, marketing in the rural areas is not at all good.

Q. : That is the point I am trying to make. Marketing is not good and there are no profitable outlets for money. It is lying with the farmers. They cannot buy gold and bury it. If we have another bumper crop, Punjab and other areas may face a much bigger problem.

Mrs. Gandhi's response was that the problem could be easily handled. She was equally reassuring when asked whether something was being done to see that the prices of foodstuffs and of essential consumer goods did not rise quicker and go higher than those of luxury goods. She agreed that the country's production policy should be suitably modified.

"We are trying to do so," she said. "We have to deal with various Ministries and of course the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission. I am going into this. We all feel very strongly on the subject."

NEW FLEXIBILITY

SNATCHES OF THE INTERVIEW I had with her on the eve of her departure for London to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference show how completely self-assured Mrs. Gandhi was a few weeks before entering her fourth year in office. About the same time there was evidence of new activity in the Government and of new policies. Reports from London described the dignified way Mrs. Gandhi conducted herself at the conference. At home there were plans to strengthen the Prime Minister's Secretariat to provide for greater co-ordination between the Centre and the States and to streamline the official machinery. There were stirrings in the Ministry of External Affairs which had already held a conference of heads of Indian missions in South Asia and the Pacific region and was planning to call a similar meeting of envoys in West Asia. It was announced that a new and enlarged unit would soon be created to look after foreign policy planning.

Meanwhile, on the third anniversary of the Tashkent Declaration India proposed to Pakistan the creation of joint machinery by the two Governments to go into various Indo-Pakistani issues. This came a few days after the Prime Minister's renewed offer of a no-war pact with Pakistan.

Since the Prime Minister had been emphasizing the need for flexibility in foreign policy, the proposal to Pakistan was taken as another indication of her desire to give up rigid positions. In keeping with her declared policy of widening the area of friendship and co-operation she had already visited Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia in the middle of 1968 and toured Latin American countries and the Caribbean area later in the year.

However, what convinced even skeptics about her determination not to allow policy to remain in a static condition was her statement that India was prepared to try to find a way of solving the dispute with China consistent with national honour and national interests. "We are today stuck in a certain position," she said. "That does not help to solve our problem with China."

She did not explain what the Government proposed to do. "We should try to find a way of solving it. What that way is, at the moment I do not know."

At my meeting with her I sought further information.

Q. : Are you ready to have a dialogue with China and if so, are you prepared to take the initiative? In fact, it is reported that you have already taken the initiative.

A. : Whatever one does in this, one has to go very slow. Taking the initiative does not mean that you have to send a personal representative or an ambassador, and the more you say about this in public, the less the chances are there of succeeding. In any case, even if something is being done, I cannot talk about it.

Q. : Arising out of this question, now that China has finished with the cultural revolution she may want to look out and seek friends.

A. : Why should one country be in friendship with another? Countries are in friendship if there is some common ground. They may not like to be friends unless they have something to gain. To be frank they are not emotional. So to some extent relations depend on the world situation, and my own view of looking at this problem or any other international problem is that no position is static. No two countries could have been more hostile perhaps than America and China, and yet they are willing to have a dialogue and even conservative Americans think that a dialogue is necessary. To some extent we can understand America. But why should China want a dialogue with America? Obviously in its list of priorities, Enemy No. 1 is the Soviet Union and Enemy No. 2 is the U.S.A. Until she eliminates Enemy No. 1, she cannot eliminate Enemy No. 2. We are not to see the rights or wrongs of anyone. But we have to see how national interests can be safeguarded with advantage. But are we supposed to declare that we have to lay down this condition?

Q. : Are we ready to meet any kind of move on China's part? I don't mean militarily. But are we ready to deal with any diplomatic move?

A. : Nobody can be ready for absolutely everything, even militarily. I have mentioned in my speeches that not a single country has ever been ready, however powerful, militarily. At



With Mr. Richard Nixon during his visit to India in 1966.



With President Tito and President Nasser.

least one year before it came we knew that a second world war would break out. We knew it was coming any day. In the first week of September, 1938, I was in Germany. I was not married, I was only engaged. Feroze, my English guardian and many other people were frantically telling me that war was going to break out within the week and that I must go out of Germany. The Government and the general public in Britain knew that war would soon break out. Later we knew that America would be attacked. This was something that was discussed daily in newspapers, and I discussed this even with some of the Labour Ministers whom I knew very well. The question was : 'Will it happen this week or next week ?' And yet, when Pearl Harbour was attacked, America was entirely taken aback. This is one thing in which the attacking side has a tremendous advantage. Nobody can say that I will cover all the coast or the Himalayas. What happened with China was unavoidable, no matter which country was attacked and howsoever strong it was.

As to diplomatic preparation, she said the problem was receiving due attention.

ACCENT ON YOUTH

EVER SINCE SHE TOOK OVER AS PRIME MINISTER, Mrs. Gandhi has been laying stress on the role and importance of young people. This may have been her reaction to the way the aged were treated during her father's time. There were no doubt political and even emotional reasons why people who had struggled and suffered during the freedom movement should have had preference over others when new ministries were formed after independence. Some of those chosen could not be ignored because of their party following and their political influence. But not a few others enjoyed power and patronage for long because once they were given a political position they insisted on being there until the time came for them to have a gun carriage funeral procession or some variation of it.

Sentimental and excessively tolerant, people in the country made good-hearted jokes about superannuated Ministers, Governors and others, but there were no organized protests, in fact no protests at all. There was so much indulgence within the Congress party and the Government as well as outside that even if a man was known to be senile and dotty, his performance, either in public or in a legislature—not excluding Parliament—was never harshly criticized. Since the influential Press was equally tolerant, the half-dead and dying men were allowed to end their days in security and comfort.

In a family such solicitude for the old is and should be admired, particularly when the State does not provide even the minimum of aid for the aged and the disabled. But politicians in office responsible for the wellbeing of millions cannot be treated merely as privileged dependants. Moreover, as a developing country what we need is dynamism, vigour, hard work and new attitudes. In other words, we need youth and modernism in the best sense of word.

Mrs. Gandhi started by putting an accent on youth, but because of the older generation's fixed ideas about people and their potential worth, everyone not belonging to what may be described as the exclusive club for the aged was very nearly

laughed out. Obviously she could not go beyond the experimental stage since, besides the old guard's opposition, she had to face criticism in the Press she might not have been prepared for. Not all those who came to power through the freedom struggle were great intellectuals, paragons of virtue or clean good human beings. With the strains of the struggle over, most of them reverted to type as soon as they found themselves in positions of power where they could also live in conditions more comfortable than they could ever have thought were within their reach.

The few younger men Mrs. Gandhi selected to assist her or merely to advise her may not have been better or worse than those who were already there. But they had one advantage over the older men. They gave promise of not sticking to hypocritical ideas. Moreover, they talked a different language. They did not repeat platitudes about service and sacrifice but discussed concrete problems requiring attention.

It was natural that Mrs. Gandhi's attempt to disturb the accepted pattern should have been strongly resented by the older leaders and that they should have got together to resist the change. It was, however, not an open confrontation. Everything was done behind the scenes and mainly group pressures were used. There was no head-on clash because neither Mrs. Gandhi and her advisers nor those opposed to any break with the past could go beyond a certain limit without endangering the party's future. It was also realized that a split might deprive all concerned of the chances of wielding power.

These calculations, however, did not weigh with the people at large and when the time came for them to pronounce their verdict they did not hesitate. In the general election of 1967 the voters made it clearly known that they were no longer prepared to leave the country's affairs in the hands of men who were more interested in personal and group politics than in public welfare. Whatever their standing in the party and the resources at their disposal, the unwanted big leaders were discarded. The more dubious the reputation the bigger was the defeat.

The election results no doubt shook the Congress, but since it maintained its position in Parliament, though with a greatly reduced majority, there was no panic. In fact, after a while Congressmen resumed their old attitude of indifference to issues

of national importance as well as to public criticism. This unconcern was brought into sharp focus at the Congress session at Panaji in Goa where most of the time was taken up by a discursive debate on prohibition.

The Congress there presented itself at its worst and the more orthodox of its members—the self-styled guardians of its basic ideals and policies—provided convincing proof of their lack of realism. No longer in touch with the people and unfamiliar with their urges and aspirations, these Congressmen have all along been demanding conformity to do's and don't laid down for the party's members in an entirely different environment half a century ago. They describe themselves as true Gandhians and true Congressmen, without realizing that Mahatma Gandhi kept the Congress alive by always moving with the times and following policies and programmes enjoying the highest priority with the people themselves.

In her firm but gentle and inoffensive way Mrs. Gandhi has been trying to give a new direction to the party's thinking. She does not talk of vague ideals. She does not moralize. All she wants is that people should work hard to develop the country and pull themselves out of poverty.

"Poverty," says Mrs. Gandhi, "is indeed the central problem facing us and it is by the way in which we set out to tackle it that we as a nation will be judged. It is a long and arduous battle that we have to wage. It demands of us all the perseverance, the discipline and the hard work of which we are capable. There will be no glamorous victories, no easy rewards."

This is the direction in which she wants the Congress and the country to go. But because she has to take the present-day misfits in the party with her, she keeps her exhortations in a low key. There is no denunciation of the fanatics and the faddists in the party, no harsh words for the aged, many of whom, being well entrenched in power, are in any case unlikely to pay serious attention to ideas other than their own.

But off and on she does allow her thoughts to find expression in mild words. Apparently reacting to the criticism that, while she lays stress on youth, she has not done anything drastic to give her own Cabinet a more youthful appearance, she says: "Youth is a matter of age, but it is also a question of mentality, courage, a sense of adventure and a scientific and

rational outlook.”

This remark, of course, cannot be taken to be any kind of defence of the elderly who surround her in the party and the Government, but does suggest what she has in mind. It also indicates the dilemma she is in. Her advocacy of youth does not always go well with the actual situation. Inevitably there is derisive laughter when someone not so young in the party takes upon himself to propagate the cult of youth or someone else of equally ripe years announces his intention of bowing out of politics at a given date in the distant future. It is, of course, not her fault that some of her party men make themselves the targets of unkind criticism. But because the ideas they clothe with their clumsy public declarations are assumed to have originated with her, she cannot always avoid herself being criticized.

Take her simple statement that “I do not want our young people to accept the formulations of their elders too tamely.” It is wholesome advice to the young when taken as such, but when this opinion is judged against the background of what actually happens in the party or the Government, people begin to develop a questioning attitude.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in her own quiet way Mrs. Gandhi is trying to suggest the development of a new outlook. What she is doing is in continuation of what her father did continuously and systematically. One of his main aims was to educate the people, to help them out of their superstitions and their lethargic and fatalistic ways. She has not set herself as an instructor, but she does wish the young to shed their mental dependence on the old with their fixed ideas and their prejudices. This is nothing surprising since youth today comprises nearly 60 per cent of the population and they are in a strong position to influence the country's development.

But while asking young people to think for themselves, she does not allow herself to forget that in our society we do not easily give up accepted ways of thinking and behaviour. She therefore warns that “in traditionalist countries like ours, Governments tend to seek advice from the elderly rather than from the young. The old, wiser in the world's ways, are also apt to give convenient advice. This can be dangerous. The outspoken, inconvenient opinion is often the more valuable.”

If while in charge of the youth section of the Congress Mrs.

Gandhi did not start a popular movement or give the organization a character of its own it was not because of lack of faith either in the young or in her own undiminished idealism. It was mainly because of the inherent weaknesses in the Congress itself. The youth section, like the parent body, is more interested in showy gatherings on special occasions to attract publicity and in self-publicity through its own publications. Again, like Congressmen, members of its youth section have no clear-cut ideology and not even a rallying slogan. The human material at her disposal was hardly the kind to be used for purposeful and profitable work. She herself, however, held the prevailing system responsible for the failure of the young to achieve worthwhile results.

"We have a strange situation in our country," she complained. "We believe in the party system, but if a person joins a political party he is denied even his legitimate rights. Sincere solid work is not eligible for a grant. This compels the creation of numerous societies and associations, wasting time and energy and introducing an element of hypocrisy."

She was alarmed at the general lack of concern with the actual results of a programme. "To give only one example. Each year the Van Mahotsava festival is greeted with fanfare. Do we look after these trees and see that they survive and grow to their full height? Have we been able to replace the trees that are cut down? Does it show superficiality or lack of thoroughness or, again, shades of hypocrisy?"

Her remarks are quoted here not merely to indicate how critical she was of conditions in the country before she was Prime Minister but to convey her solicitude for the young and her confidence in their ability to do things.

This is clear from the following passage from one of her speeches: "Reading the newspapers or listening to armchair politicians who abound in our country, one forms a pessimistic picture of the Indian scene and especially of young people. Who can deny that there is hardship because of high prices and unemployment? It is also true that there is dissatisfaction with the administration and irritation with our party? These have to be faced and their causes sought and quickly remedied.

"As a nation we have many shortcomings. If this were the whole of the story it would indeed be depressing. But as I

travel around the country and have the opportunity of meeting people from all walks of life I see something else. Not perfection, of course, but many evidences of a difficult job well done.

"In the mass of our people there is perceptible an awakening and a momentum that is gathering force. Here and there in the midst of confusion, there is clarity, in the midst of darkness there is light. One has glimpses of integrity and selflessness, of perseverance and devotion to duty. There are countless young men and women in the government administration as well as in the ranks of the Congress party who are ignoring difficulties and surmounting obstacles in the pursuit of their work, away from the glare of publicity with none to approve or applaud.

"There are the scientists, doctors and technical men who have turned their backs to lucrative and attractive posts abroad to place their talents at the service of their motherland. There are the humble village workers. Some do extraordinary deeds and some do ordinary deeds extraordinarily well. There are those who, in spite of a wholetime arduous job, offer their leisure for voluntary service. There are those who are stationed in far-flung tribal areas, cut off from all amenities or news of home. There are the young men who, during the elections, volunteered to cross over high and dangerous mountain ranges in order to bring practical democracy to the valleys which lie beyond.

"Such is the stuff of which heroes are made. Such is the spirit which our great leaders have tried to instil in us. And while men and women with this spirit exist, they are like the tiny deepaks, twinkling in the darkness of Diwali night, opening the doors to Lakshmi, beckoning to good luck and prosperity."

VARIED INTERESTS

ONE OF MR. NEHRU'S SENIOR CABINET colleagues called on him one morning to discuss State affairs. The consultation over, he came out of his Teen Moorti house to see the visitor off. Attracted by some flowers in full bloom he invited his visitor's attention to them and asked if he knew what they were. The politician was completely at a loss for he had seldom taken interest in anything but politics and matters political. Mr. Nehru showed simulated surprise as he could not have been irritated or annoyed, for as a rule most Congressmen have for long been averse to exposing themselves to influences other than political. Many wonder if that is why Mr. Nehru, with his many-sided interests, was essentially a lonely man, especially when he was Prime Minister.

Mrs. Gandhi has inherited or developed similar interests but, unlike him, she is not known to pay special attention to anything beyond what she has to do from day to day. Once in a way her sartorial preferences are taken notice of. But little is ever said about the way she keeps herself abreast of developments in other spheres of life.

In New Delhi's politics ridden atmosphere few Ministers have ever cared to impart any kind of individuality either to their homes or their offices. This may be equally true of State capitals as well, for the fact of a woman Congress Minister in a provincial cabinet in the late thirties wanting a flower vase in her office room received a great deal of publicity. The woman Minister may have made a departure, but she did not start a trend. Ministers' offices and homes, at least in New Delhi, continue to be largely at the mercy of the Public Works Department officials who maintain them at public expense. Exceptions no doubt are there, but when they come to light there is always a stream of questions in Parliament demanding why any Minister, enjoying the amenity of a free, furnished house, has been permitted to stray from the drab norm dictated by the Central P.W.D. This may suggest a kind of regimentation for the Ministers, and in some ways it is. But Ministers, powerful

beings as they are, cannot be easily made to obey the regulations.

Apart from a princely Minister who has furnished and decorated his office at his own expense and some others who have yielded to their artistic temptations to make their homes as they want them, the C.P.W.D. drabness does prevail in ministerial offices and homes alike.

Mrs. Gandhi, being no conformist, has a well-appointed office and a house which, though small, is not without a personal touch. There are books, paintings and pieces of sculpture. The books, apart from those which are there to remind foreign—and even Indian—visitors that we produce a large variety of them, show her own taste and interests. But the range of her interests is not confined to art and literature. For example, it is not known that the practice of having a folk dance festival on the occasion of Republic Day was started by Mr. Nehru at Mrs. Gandhi's instance. She is believed to have told her father that a military parade, however impressive, was not enough. There should be something gay and entertaining for the people. Why not get troupes of folk dancers from all over the country to give public performances? Because of the rich variety of dances and the wealth of talent the festival has become an important part of the Republic Day celebrations.

Since taking over as Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi regularly meets authors, painters, musicians, scientists, architects and others in the field of ideas and culture. Before leaving for a trip abroad she sends to Indian missions in the countries to be visited lists of people she wants to meet and when there makes it a point to find time for them.

Mrs. Gandhi is very meticulous about her correspondence. She dictates the routine letters but writes many special ones in her own hand. Anyone writing to her on any subject can expect a carefully considered reply. At the end of 1968, she received a letter from a young girl in Bombay inviting her comments on dress styles, film censorship, parochialism and people's partiality for foreign-made things. Mrs. Gandhi replied to her from Ranchi while on a tour of Bihar. The letter is of interest since it contains Mrs. Gandhi's views on fairly controversial topics.

Says Mrs. Gandhi: "Thank you for your interesting letter. Many in the country will probably share your views regarding

our films. But among the 50 million annual cinema going public, a large number seem to like them. What the masses like is not necessarily right. Good taste is not instinctive and, I am afraid, not much of it is evident, especially amongst those who are for the first time moving out of the poverty line.

"The norms of what is decent and courteous behaviour change from age to age. In our own country, as the paintings and sculptures in sacred temples show, the non-wearing of an upper garment was not considered indecent in the early days. Even in societies which are strict in regard to dress and public deportment, there are always rebels who defy conventions. Sometimes these rebels have also been great artists who think that conventions obscure reality.

"Every country has laws to regulate obscenity, but these laws themselves have undergone changes. In our country there is a special machinery of censorship to examine films before their release. The more vulgar and suggestive sequences, and those which promote hatred and violence, are in fact cut out. But you are right in saying that many of our films are mediocre. The educative potentialities of the film medium have not been realized.

"You have also made some observations on the tendency of our people to move amidst their own linguistic or provincial groups. Earlier, this was so in all countries, except the U.S.A. whose entire population has come from different countries. Mobility is somewhat new in our country. It is only after the growth of industrialization and urban development that people can become truly cosmopolitan.

"During colonial rule, our languages and culture were suppressed and frowned upon. This is the main reason for the present phase of aggravated linguistic and regional loyalties. Unfortunately this situation is exploited for political reasons. Some of us are fighting this trend with determination. But even in advanced countries there is a surprising amount of regional feeling. Britain, for example, has the problem of Scottisth and Welsh nationalism; Belgium a clash between the French and the Walloon; the U.S. has New England and Southern loyalties.

"You are also right in condemning the craze for foreign products and foreign brand-names. But here also we must realize

that it is natural for people in all countries to consider the outside world more glamorous. With us it is also a result of long years of foreign rule. As we progress towards greater self-reliance and as we build up foreign markets and a larger domestic market for our industrial goods, this inferiority complex will go. Meanwhile, we need more people like you who are proud of the country and vocal about that pride."

Here is another of Mrs. Gandhi's letters written on January 1, 1969, in reply to someone in Calcutta: "Thank you for your kind letter. It made me reflect on the responsibilities which persons in public life have to shoulder. I cannot claim to have all the answers to the country's problems, nor to set anything right. I can only hope to progress step by step, to the limit of my powers.

"All of us need to have faith and also to constantly enlarge our knowledge. Which is better, you ask, faith or knowledge? Can we live only by the one without the other?"

A third letter discusses what beauty is in reply to a letter from a woman in New York.

"You have given the views of some eminent persons," says Mrs. Gandhi. "May I add another quotation. It is from Hellen Waddell's book on Peter Abelard: 'This is the difference between loveliness and beauty. Wisdom, the knowledge of things past, the memory of the tree in Eden. Loveliness is an easy thing, an apple tree in blossom, and most women have something of it in their youth. But beauty—one or perhaps two, in every generation. Persiphone came back from the dead, with the knowledge of the kingdom of it in her face'.

"Beauty is not merely a question of face and figure, elegance and grace, but of one's personality, which is inevitably mirrored in one's expression and gestures. To be interesting one has to be interested in people and ideas, and in the world around one. Beauty should be pleasing to the eye and also the mind. It should harmonize loveliness of spirit with serenity and compassion."

From abstract ideas about loveliness and beauty to the ugliness of human behaviour. The following is Mrs. Gandhi's reply to a letter from a Harijan boy complaining of discrimination:

"Thank you for your letter. You have written with much feeling, having yourself suffered discrimination and injustice.

But please do not think that all people born in other castes are incapable of understanding your anguish—or that all of them are bent on perpetuating the indignity. Fortunately for me I was born and brought up in an atmosphere which rejected the caste hierarchy. No person has a right to feel superior merely because of the incidence of his birth. I am determined to speak out against all forms of ill-treatment which have brought shame to our country. It is not right to keep silent. At the same time, it is not enough just to speak. We must all combine in a mighty bout for social change.

“You have the blessings of a good education. You are in the Air Force where there is a greater sense of equality than in your village. Industrial progress and modernization are bound to bring changes. Face your problems with courage. If people are unjust to you because of your birth, pity them for their foolishness. But refuse to be treated as anything but an equal.”

As if anticipating the new bonds of friendship forged between India and Iran at the end of 1968 as a result of the visit to India of the Shahanshah and Shahbanon of Iran, Mrs. Gandhi wrote the following letter in reply to one from a girl in Meshed:

“I am glad to get your letter. I love children and especially little girls because I have no sisters and no daughters.

“You have written a beautiful letter. How I wish that, like my grandfather and my great-grandfather also, I knew Persian. I have had to have your letter translated. But there are many Persian words in our language, Urdu.

“I agree that war is bad. In fact in India our policy is to find peaceful solutions to all disputes. We should like to have no-war pacts with all our neighbours. We have never made war but naturally when our country is attacked, we must defend it. That is what happened last year. India was invaded by Pakistan armies, so our own armies had to go into action and drive them out.

“My father was a man who did not know fear or hatred. He worked for peace all his life. We would like all countries to live in peace and friendship.

“I hope you will be a friend to India and will promote friendship between Iran and India.”

METHODICAL WORK

ACCORDING TO MRS. GANDHI, one of our greatest problems is that of *changing our methods of work, our modes of thinking*, not only amongst those who are illiterate or do not have the privilege of higher education, but even among those of us who do have that privilege.

"I find that everybody agrees when we make generalisations and say there should be change, or opportunity should be given to the younger people, greater responsibility should be given to younger scientists, technologists and others. But when a specific case comes up, then a hundred and one reasons are advanced why it cannot be done. And until we have the strength to break through this wall, which I must admit I find a very strong, high and powerful wall imprisoning us, science will have value for only a few in India."

On another occasion she talked about functioning of the bureaucracy and again blamed our 'old outlook'. She said :

"We talk of delays due to bureaucratic procedures in the administration of our science and technology. Is the bureaucracy alone to blame or is it our own sense of status and hierarchy which so pervades our attitude and our system that even scientists sometimes fall prey to it? The question is not so much *whether the general administrator or a person with technological qualifications* should be in charge of scientific and technological programme but rather that the attitude of science and technology should prevail over the old outlook of rank and hierarchy."

Has she as Prime Minister broken through the wall built by the opponents of change and the believers in status and hierarchy? Judging by the way the Government continues to work the wall is still very much there. But she does seem to have made a dent in it where her own work is concerned. Those associated with her at different levels have come to realize that she does not depend on instinct or inspiration. She relies on systematic staff work in the manner of modern administrators.

For instance, before she appears at a Press conference she

arms herself with notes prepared by her secretaries on different subjects. These notes do not merely provide the background. The Secretaries are expected to anticipate questions likely to be asked and prepare answers for them. She is equally careful about the speeches she makes. Though a fast reader, she finds no difficulty in putting her finger on the important passages in a draft requiring changes, which she goes on making even until a few minutes before she has to speak.

In the interest of speed and efficiency she has done away with much of the formality associated with receiving visitors. When wanting to clear a point or exchange views on some issue with her Cabinet colleagues or with officials she does not wait for a meeting. She finds the telephone quicker and more convenient. For the same reason she has made herself completely accessible both to Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Mrs. Gandhi, like her father, is a devotee of science and the scientific outlook, and she has found in science a new meaning applicable to work in the Government. The general administrator, she says, is basically a status quo man. He lives by rules which are the outcome of precedents and past experience. The scientist, on the other hand, is an agent of change.

Because the future has no precedents, she feels that scientists, managers and, indeed politicians, must have a keen perception of the future and be sensitive to change. "Expert knowledge provides the necessary means for informed governmental decisions, especially when they deal with the increasingly complex process of industrial and economic growth. Most people still tend to judge government by the static norms of the revenue dominated and law and order administration of the olden days, little appreciating how complex the process of government has become in the last 20 years."

It cannot be said that under her the Government as such has become more scientific in its approach, but she certainly has been trying to impart some of her own enthusiasm for the scientific outlook to those working with her. She has also been trying to ensure that the general administrator with his mind full of the past and precedents does not always have sway over others. How far she succeeds does not depend on her alone, for even as Prime Minister she cannot always have her way. As Mr. Nehru often said, the country's administrative machinery, steeped in

its own red tape traditions, is much more powerful than the most powerful Prime Minister.

For a start Mrs. Gandhi has reorganized the body previously known as the Scientific Advisory Committee. Renamed as the Committee on Science and Technology it will now advise the Cabinet on how to make the best use of the available resources. Unlike in the past when allocations were distributed over a large area, the money will now be spent more judiciously on research and other projects capable of yielding practical results. A number of study teams have already been appointed to go into the utility and feasibility of new projects and to suggest whether any of the existing ones can be profitably expanded.

The whole idea is not to treat science as being in a separate compartment but to enable scientists to take a direct interest in the Government's work. It is felt that scientists cannot give of their best if all that is required of them is to run national laboratories and pursue their own lines of research. In their way both fundamental and applied research are important, but scientists must also feel a sense of involvement in the country's programmes for development.

Mrs. Gandhi has taken a new step. It will now be for scientists to prove if they can be of as great help to the Government and industry as their co-workers are in countries like the U.S.A. The Government as well as industrial concerns in the U.S.A. set apart millions of dollars for research every year because they know that even a small change in technique or in a manufacturing process can lead to a saving of many more millions or in expanding production.

Mrs. Gandhi, however, does not wish scientists to think of mere efficiency or productivity alone. She believes that efficiency divorced from the facts of life around us can create new problems. "Anyone who wishes to be effective as well as efficient must develop a social conscience and sensitivity to the needs of our people as a whole."

ECONOMIC POLICY

THERE IS A GENERAL IMPRESSION that under Mrs. Indira Gandhi the Government has adopted a softer attitude towards the private sector and also on the question of foreign collaboration in industry. This is reflected in much of the Left-wing criticism of her policies. In the economic field, it is contended, she has given up the Nehru line and is chartering a new course. By deviating from the old policies she is taking the country away from the goal of Socialism.

Questioned about it, Mrs. Gandhi flatly denied any break from the old policies. It is, however, clear that, as in other spheres, she does not favour dogmatism or rigidity. To her government is the art of the possible. She spelt this out when addressing a meeting of industrialists.

"What the level of taxation should be at any given time," she said, "calls for a deep study of the prevailing situation as well as of the direction in which the economy should be moving at that point of time.

"A sectional or static view can be dangerous. If we think only in terms of today, we might seem to be better off if taxes were reduced. But the results tomorrow may be different. There would either be large-scale unemployment following cuts in Government expenditure, or a further upsurge of prices due to inflation. So taxation should not be discussed as an issue between the Government which levies them and business and industry and the consumers who pay, but in terms of its impact on the economy—whether it acts as an accelerator or as a brake."

She went on : "Certainly let us argue about taxation and about production being the key to Socialism. But don't let these arguments drown realities. And the realities are that in the world today, as indeed in our own country, millions upon millions of people have become conscious of their rights, even though the consciousness of matching obligations has not grown correspondingly. The task for politicians and business men, for scientists and for sociologists is to deal with this present-day reality.



With folk dancers during Republic Day celebrations.



With the bride, Sonia, at a ceremony during her son Rajiv's wedding, in New Delhi in 1968.

"It is logical to say how wonderful everything would be if industry were organized and business run on the basis of the laws of the market of supply and demand, unfettered by other considerations. But is this possible? I am not going into the question of desirability, but only posing the question of possibility in this, the latter half of the 20th century. How do we then face the overwhelming majority of people who are abysmally poor, who are denied their basic needs?

"Those who work in the political field have a right to ask this question of those who work in industry. It is important to increase production, but that is not the whole answer. For the problem is not one of finding the ultimate solution, but also of answering the questions of today. I should indeed be happy if there were some magic formula which would bring the three elements together in a symphony of satisfaction and euphoria. There is no magic except that of ceaseless search and endeavour.

"The Government's approach has to be empirical, whether in respect of taxation or in respect of control. No one derives pleasure in having controls for their own sake. We resort to them, selectively, in response to varying situations of our economy. As soon as conditions mature, when controls cease to serve the purpose, the Government has had no hesitation in modifying or even dismantling them."

So even if there are minor shifts in the Government's policy it cannot be said that she has forgotten her faith in Socialistic ideas. The following quotations bring this home even more clearly :

"Can we apply one set of standards to judge the performance of the rich nations, and another within our own country? If the art or science of international politics consists in building bridges between the rich and poor nations, the art and science of our own domestic politics must consist of building bridges between riches and poverty, between affluence and penury, between the dwellers in the mansions and the dwellers in the jhugis and jhonparis. Without some such perception and balance, we shall be engineering chaos, instability and upheaval. Taxation is a small price to pay in order to create an atmosphere that those who have affluence also possess a conscience and a sense of duty to the have-nots.

"I believe that the only dividing line in India is between those

who think and feel in terms of the totality of our national interest and endeavour, and those who are guided by particularism of one sort or another. I am strongly opposed to the latter and I make no secret of this. We are one country and one people. I cannot admit of the validity of any loyalty other than to India. I shall always resist the walls of ignorance, of prejudice or of sectional interest of one sort or another."

Besides being opposed to sectional interests, be they political, social or economic, Mrs. Gandhi is also in favour of national self-sufficiency. The Indian Institute of Management was hardly the place to express her views on foreign collaboration and on the need to prefer Indian to foreign goods, but she found it appropriate enough. Speaking at the institute's third annual convocation she said :

"All over the world a certain glamour is attached to things from outside and foreign brand - names are more in demand. At one time or another, almost every country has felt the need to popularize its own products. I remember the 'Buy British' campaign in England with its slogan British is Best. In India the craze for foreign goods may be one of the side effects of our old colonial past. This psychology of inferiority is an obstacle in our rise to the top. Gandhiji put us on the right track when he introduced the Use Swadeshi movement.

"We have all certain common tasks and imperatives. The foremost of them is to develop greater pride in Indian products and Indian skills. Inventiveness and the use of indigenous materials and skills must be encouraged. With a little more confidence in the proven abilities which have been developed in the country, *there would be less need for collaboration.* We cannot do without importing know-how and technology, specially in the comparatively new industries, but dependence on collaboration is bad, for it diverts us from our own effort and encourages people to take the easy road. I am reminded of a few lines of verse which I read some years ago. The stanza goes as follows :

"Knock, knock

'Who is there ?'

'A little lonely sin.'

'Come in,' I said, and all hell was in."

Then she went on to talk about the economy and not so surprisingly ended with a housewifely remark about lack of

cleanliness in factories.

She said : "The public and private sectors have complementary roles. Each has equal need to use indigenous materials and skills extensively, to save foreign exchange, to secure economies, to explore export possibilities to the maximum, to improve methods of maintenance, to enforce the highest standards of product, to improve in-plant training and to secure greater worker-participation. These tasks rest on the shoulders of the executive. Many of our factories are as good as any in the world, but we must confess that many are slovenly. We do not always give the attention necessary to details. The floor of a factory sometimes can reflect the efficiency of the manager."

FAITHFUL CAMPAIGNER

MRS. GANDHI DID NOT HAVE MUCH TO SAY when she was elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party on January 19, 1966, except to describe herself as a servant of the nation and a servant of the party. But on March 12, 1967, when she was elected for the second time she stated her general policy, indicating the objectives she had set for herself. The country, she said, demanded not only right policies but quick and efficient implementation of those policies for quick results.

She had been Prime Minister for well over a year between the two elections and had no doubt endeavoured to achieve some of the objectives enumerated by her. But it is significant that she mentioned no achievement. Nor did she try to offer explanations for the Government's shortcomings and failures. For the first time since independence the Congress had been defeated in many States and had been returned to Parliament with a much smaller majority. This setback should have been uppermost in her mind, but she referred to it only in passing.

"We face a changed situation," she said. "I am told, if this figure is correct, that since 1952 there has been only a 5 per cent fluctuation in the voting and yet it has created a tremendously changed picture. We are today not only in government but in some States in the opposition."

Having said this she could have gone into the causes and suggested ways of remedying the situation. She could even have found fault with others and defended herself. But she was content merely to add: "We have to create, and we have to show, good standards of democratic functioning. We have to deal and work along with the opposition, wherever they work for the good of the country, wherever we feel that they are going in the right direction. We must not oppose them merely for the sake of opposition, as sometimes we ourselves have been opposed. Even here in Parliament, we will find it a difficult task to work with the many elements who comprise the opposition."

Was it the sense of defeat that led her to pitch her speech in such a low key? She could not, of course, disregard the adverse

election results. But judging by her speeches over the years it was not subdued because of discomfiture. Except when provoked, she does not allow herself to speak excitedly, and in her acceptance speech she emphasized that "today no responsible person or party can make very spectacular statements." As far as she herself is concerned, during the years in office she has been equally restrained in making claims for herself, her Government or her party. But that has not shielded her against criticism of which she has perhaps had more than either her father or Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Much of the criticism may have been justified, but even her opponents could not have been happy over the sweeping denunciation of her Government and its handling of national problems. Hardly ever has she been given credit for the systematic and sustained efforts she has made to give a clear direction to policies and to transform the administrative machinery into a smoothly working organization. It is conveniently forgotten that, despite the superciliousness with which she is treated by many politicians and political commentators, she is among the very few leaders in the country who can appear at a public meeting in any part of the country and talk to the people with complete self-assurance. She also belongs to the fast dwindling group of Congressmen who have both faith in and loyalty to their party. Others' attitudes and even motives may at times be doubted, but she is steadfast in her belief in secularism, socialism and democracy.

Mrs. Gandhi was the only senior Congress leader who was not complacent during the 1967 election and, emulating her father's example, travelled all over the country to canvass for the party. "It was only given to her," said a foreign commentator two years later, "to bear the strain of long and arduous journeys of such campaigns which showed her to be a woman of tremendous endurance and courage."

One of the reasons why she is so mercilessly attacked by her critics is that she is a woman. Perhaps unconsciously even the professedly enlightened and modern among them do not ever spare her. It may therefore be of interest to quote what she herself has to say about her being a woman. Tied to tradition as we are, many of us are more than shocked when we meet a new situation probably because the generation before independence

did not ever dream of social changes even when independence came. To the people of that generation independence did not bring any change in their attitudes or their way of life. It was merely a political development which was not expected to disturb their social outlook or beliefs in any other sphere.

Having watched the changing scene, Mrs. Gandhi knew what it meant. Even after she had been Prime Minister for over two years she did not forget how her traditional detractors had used the argument of her being a woman against her.\

Apparently expressing her pent-up feelings she burst out :

"Now they (the men) qualify my position and my situation as being a woman's. When I was put in jail and tortured for civil disobedience along with others, when they asked me to join the marches and the demonstrations, they never asked me if I was a man or a woman. And later, when I was sent to quell the riots and the disturbances in several towns, they never thought of me as a woman. In one town where there was a riot, no man dared to go. I was sent, and I pacified the people ...At one time, I had to walk for twelve days because the place was so rocky even a donkey could not get there. The most difficult jobs were given to me, jobs where a man's physical strength was needed. They never considered my being a woman whenever I was sent out on a job. Now they want to bring it out because of my position."

By the end of 1968 when she started another whirlwind tour of the States where the failure of the United Fronts had led to President's rule and then to mid-term elections, she had already known what it was to be a woman Prime Minister and how it felt running a Government according to her own ideas but with doubtful support from the party, the Press and even from her own colleagues.

But as she made one sortie after another into Punjab, U.P., West Bengal or Bihar, she was full of faith and determination. Obviously she was living up to her own credo. "When you go into battle," she said at a public meeting a few months after becoming Prime Minister, "you must go with the point of view of winning. Nobody can win a battle if he goes thinking that he cannot perhaps win. If you have that thought, then already half the battle is lost."

So she braved the icy cold weather and the black flag demons-

trators to be able to tell voters in the four States that their future was still safe with the Congress. She did not spare either the anti-Congress United Fronts or parties like the Jana Sangh which, she said, were out to encourage the country's disintegration.

In Ludhiana where she addressed a huge meeting on January 14, 1969, she was in battle and in a fighting mood. She lashed out at the Sangh's exploitation of the people in the name of religion. Reminding her 50,000 listeners in one of the Sangh's strongholds in Punjab of its attitude to Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, she declared : "And now I have become the target of the Sangh leaders' attack. They blame me and criticize me for no reason at all."

As in 1967, not many of her senior colleagues in the Congress seemed to be interested in the political future of some of the most vital areas in the country—the real Hindi heartland comprising U.P. and Bihar and the two sensitive border regions of West Bengal and Punjab—in fact the entire Gangetic Valley. Why was it once again only given to her to campaign for the party without respite ? The answer is provided by her beliefs and attitudes which she does not give up easily and no doubt her complete sincerity in doing everything she undertakes to do.

Whatever may have been her feelings before she was elected by the party to be its leader in Parliament, as Prime Minister she has never swerved from its basic policies. According to herself, when she was chosen in 1966 to succeed Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri she was taken unawares. "I had no thought of occupying this high position," she says. "The developments which took place immediately before the election came as a surprise to me. Interest in the election seemed to be in the hands of the Congress President and other senior leaders."

But when the party met again to elect a leader after the 1967 general election, she had already been Prime Minister. "I had gone through an extremely difficult position in the country and through the general election. From the information available to me, a majority of members were supporting me. But naturally we were all anxious that if there could be co-operation among all sections, it would be better for the party. Once this arrangement had been made and decided upon the actual election became a mere formality."

It is thus clear that she accepted the second term because she was assured of co-operation by all groups in the party. Whether as Prime Minister she has received the same co-operation or she has been working without it, nobody can deny that she has been completely loyal to the party and its ideals and has strained herself to the utmost to be true to her own commitments.

PEACE AND POVERTY

AS REQUIRED BY A PRIME MINISTER, Mrs. Gandhi has made hundreds of speeches during the last three years and addressed audiences of all descriptions from village meetings to international gatherings. In some of her speeches in Parliament and outside she has given a fairly clear indication of what she stands for and in which direction she wants the country to go. Since she does not possess the same gift of eloquence as her father, she prefers to depend on previously prepared speeches when addressing sophisticated audiences. She can thus be sure of saying exactly what she wants to say. But she is very much at home speaking extempore when addressing mass meetings whether in cities or in rural areas.

In the country generally and in Parliament in particular her Government's foreign policy is frequently discussed. In accordance with their own ideologies and attitudes, politicians and commentators not only criticize this policy but suggest and even demand that it should be revised. Two of Mrs. Gandhi's speeches can be of great help to understand her own way of looking at problems. One was her address at the General Assembly of the United Nations on October 14, 1968, and the other her address inaugurating the Second United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in New Delhi on February 1, 1968.

These speeches stand out partly because they were made at important international gatherings but largely because in them has been packed a great deal of Mrs. Gandhi's thinking on political and economic relations between one country and another. The United Nations address has an added value. Though based on drafts prepared by her staff, its final form is Mrs. Gandhi's very own. Arriving in New York in the early hours of the morning on which she was to address the U.N. Assembly she gave finishing touches to the speech before resting for a few hours.

It was in this speech that she asked the United Nations to observe 1970—when the organization completes its 25th year—as the Year of Peace to be a starting point of a united endeavour

to give mankind the blessings of a durable peace.

She made this appeal, for India has never lost faith in the aims or the utility of the United Nations. According to her, it is the trustee of the world's peace and represents the hopes of mankind. "Its very existence", she declared, "gives a feeling of assurance that the justice of true causes can be brought fearlessly before the world. This Assembly and the agencies of the United Nations should, in all they do, sustain those hopes and promote the cause of peace".

It was natural for her to remember the occasion when her father addressed the U.N. Assembly seven years earlier. Mentioning this she said : "He was a believer in seeking areas of agreement and co-operation, and in enlarging them. He advocated before this Assembly a 'new approach to co-operation and the furtherance of the co-operative effort'. The Assembly accepted his suggestion of an International Co-operation Year. The United Nations also launched a Development Decade to promote greater economic co-operation between the rich and the poor nations. Two major international conferences on trade and development were held.

"The interest shown by Member States in these moves aroused great expectations among the developing countries. We did not seek to share the power of the big Powers. We did not ask that they deny any of their own people their needs in order to fulfil ours. We, who have had twenty years or less of freedom to work for our progress, did not expect miracles of sudden transformation. Only too well do we know how long and hard is the path of development. What we do expect is understanding of the intangible yearnings of peoples who have long been under foreign domination.

"Unfortunately, economic co-operation has little progress to show. Nor has there been any notable advance in international co-operation in the political sphere. The reasons for this failure are obvious and many : Economic and military power continues to dominate politics. The carving out of spheres of influence still motivates policies and actions. The desire to mould other nations in the image of one's own inspires propaganda, sowing seeds of mistrust. Nations continue to place narrow national ends above the larger purpose of peace and universal security."

Having had her say against the big Powers' tendency to influence smaller nations through economic pressures, she explained why the doctrine of peaceful co-existence had not always worked in favour of nations wishing to pursue a peaceful policy and to settle all international disputes without resort to arms. She no doubt had India's own experience in mind, for in this decade we have had to defend our country twice against aggressive neighbours.

She said : "In India we have been powerfully conditioned by Mahatma Gandhi. We believe that the evolution of individuals and societies depends on the extent to which they exercise self-restraint and abjure the use of force. Jawaharlal Nehru, who combined in himself modern political thought and the basic teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, strove to bring about a new system of relations amongst nations. He was tireless in advocating peaceful co-existence. He believed that in a world rent by conflict, freedom not fear, faith not doubt, confidence not suspicion would lead to friendship amongst nations.

"The concept was evoking some response amongst statesmen and nations, and there was a growing recognition that howsoever difficult it might seem peaceful co-existence alone could enable the post-war world to solve its disputes rationally. But this trend has received severe jolts.

"Every now and then violence erupts. Sheer power seemingly prevails over principles, seeking obedience and demanding respect instead of commanding it. Indeed, those who have attempted to eschew the use of force have had to pay the price of restraint. And yet, the world is changing. Implicit faith in the efficacy of and unquestioning dependence on military alliances, as well as the rigidities of the bipolar world, are in a state of flux. Every nation, regardless of its size, is endeavouring to establish its own identity. This encourages the hope that despite obstacles the United Nations will be able to help all nations to live in peace and independence."

Although India's views on Viet-Nam, West Asia, race relations and sovereignty of nations are widely known, the way Mrs. Gandhi presented them to the U.N. Assembly cannot be without interest.

"While there is search for a more equitable and humane world order," she said, "force continues to be used to attain

political ends and to promote national or global interests. It is not my intention to deal with specific issues. Our views have been stated in this Assembly and elsewhere. But there are some which cannot be ignored. The continuance of the tragic conflict in Viet-Nam is a source of constant anxiety. We fervently hope that conditions will be created to enable the discussions to become more purposeful. The Viet-Nameese people must be assured of their inherent right to shape their destiny peacefully and without outside interference.... In advocating this we are not actuated by a partisan spirit but by our sincere desire for peace and stability.

"Another source of anxiety—the West Asian crisis—also needs to be resolved by political means. There is every opportunity for doing so, if it is recognized that the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the States in this part of the world cannot be based on the redrawing of State frontiers by force or on the basis of permanent hostility. Essential for a peaceful settlement is the withdrawal of foreign forces from all Arab territories occupied in June last year.

"Equally explosive is the continued denial of basic human rights on grounds of race. The consciousness of the world community must be aroused not only against South Africa where racial discrimination has been elevated to the level of State policy, but against the emergence of racialism in any form in other areas. We must also firmly resist the last vestiges of colonialism. Our freedom and independence will not be complete so long as the people of South West Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea are denied theirs.

"Recent events in Czechoslovakia have cast yet another shadow on the fragile structure for a new world order. The principles of non-interference by one State in the internal affairs of another, of scrupulous respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all States, are essential to the principle of peaceful co-existence. It is of the utmost importance that normal conditions should be restored without delay in Czechoslovakia.

"If the use of force in international affairs is not renounced, and the rights of nations and the equality of races are not respected, how can tensions be reduced or the dangers of conflicts avoided? The world is caught in a vicious circle, because of

which any viable international machinery to regulate relations between States is being progressively undermined and faces the danger of eventual collapse."

Going on to criticize the nuclear Powers' policy of continuing to enlarge their capacity for nuclear war, she said that the arms race and the search for more sophisticated weapons had rendered the concept of balance of power meaningless. "Yet every advance in military technology is accompanied by an effort to maintain a balance of terror. This encourages local wars and undermines the established political authority in States which are struggling to protect their freedom."

Mrs. Gandhi made it clear that the urge among nations to acquire nuclear status cannot be curbed if there are no restrictions on those already in possession of nuclear weapons.

"It is by restricting, reducing and eventually eliminating the growing nuclear menace that firm foundations of peace can be laid. The limited achievement of the partial Test Ban Treaty has been offset by the refusal of States to halt the testing of nuclear weapons. The problems of insecurity cannot be solved by imposing arbitrary restrictions on those who do not possess nuclear weapons, without any corresponding steps to deal with the basic problems of limiting stockpiles in the hands of a few Powers. How can the urge to acquire nuclear status be controlled so long as this imbalance persists? Unless the Powers which possess these weapons are prepared to exercise some self-restraint, collective efforts to rid the world of the nuclear menace cannot bear fruit."

Speaking for a developing nation, she gave expression to the feelings of all in the same position. When she had finished speaking a number of Afro-Asian diplomats are reported to have sought out Indians present not to compliment them on their Prime Minister's performance but to tell them that she had put into words what many of them felt.

She said: "We yearn for peace, not merely because it is good in itself, but because without peace there can be no improvement in the lives of the vast majority of the world's peoples. Development must receive the first priority and must be based on self-reliance. Our peoples expect their governments to build, in a generation, the apparatus of production and distribution which took the present advanced nations many centuries

to install. Progress in technology and the acceleration of the processes of history will certainly help the developing nations to telescope the stages of their economic growth. But this acceleration works even more dramatically in favour of the affluent. The chasm between the rich and the poor nations, which is already a source of tension and bitterness in the world, is not decreasing but growing.

"This situation is fraught with danger for the future well-being of our world. It is natural that we in the developing countries should be more aware of the peril than those who live in the affluent countries. The peril is on our doorstep, but it is not too far from theirs.

"The world has changed, the membership of the United Nations has changed, but attitudes of mind have not. The representatives who are gathered here come from countries with distinct personalities. They have had greater civilizations in the past—some known and some yet to be discovered. In the old colonial days, history, geography, culture and civilization were all viewed from a particular perspective. Even today to be civilized is held to be synonymous with being Westernized. Advanced countries devote large resources to formulating and spreading ideas and doctrines and they tend to impose on the developing nations their own norms and methods. The pattern of the classical acquisitive society with its deliberate multiplication of wants not only is unsuited to conditions in our countries but is positively harmful."

At the UNCTAD II meeting Mrs. Gandhi dealt with India's economic problems before discussing the question of aid from developed to developing countries.

"For more than a hundred years", she said, "the most sensitive and perceptive minds in our country have been obsessed with poverty and have striven to remove its causes. Our fight for freedom was itself part of the greater fight to liberate our people from the grip of poverty and the fear of economic insecurity. The vastness of our country makes the challenge so much the greater. Whatever we do must be done for 560,000 villages. In the last 15 years, we have almost doubled agricultural production, created 30 million jobs, put 45 million more children in schools, added 20 years to the life-span, and established a base of heavy industries, but we cannot even take time off to think of

this as an achievement. We must go on with our work, for what is unfinished is so much larger than what is done."

Referring to the efforts being made all over the world to promote economic progress during the Development Decade, she pointed out that though the period was coming to a close the achievements had not been very remarkable.

She said : "During the last years, most Member States have laboured, individually or collectively, to promote economic advancement in underdeveloped countries. An average growth rate of 4.6 per cent per annum has been achieved, but it dwindles to a mere 2 per cent if we take into account the increase in population. Anyhow, the average growth rate is at best an imperfect measure of social and economic development. A much surer guide is the per capita income, on which the efforts so far made have had little impact. It is the human aspect—the opportunity for men and women everywhere to lead a fuller life—which is of the utmost importance. So long as the fundamental rights of millions of people in regard to employment, food, shelter and other needs remain unsatisfied, so long will their urge to rise to their full stature and serve their fellow men remain unfulfilled."

No aid is without some visible or invisible strings. The nations offering help always want something in return from those receiving it. Mrs. Gandhi brought this out in the following passages :

"This situation is a source of anxiety. The goal is distant. But impatience and dissatisfaction sap our will to persevere. Those who look upon development assistance as repayable charity will inevitably miss the expected gratitude from its beneficiaries. Those who view it as investment to earn political support or to collect dividends or to promote trade will be disappointed with the meagre returns. At the same time, growing numbers in the developing countries are beginning to look upon external capital and know-how, not as aids to their own strength and achievement of economic freedom, but as bonds which increase their dependence on dominant economies.

"We must all plead guilty to being tempted by the illusion that small efforts can yield big results. This is why we become disenchanted, and international economic co-operation is the first casualty. Thus, domestic pressures mount. Our affluent

friends seek to curtail their contribution to development. In turn the recipients of aid retreat inwards.

"Today the rich nations find it more rewarding to invest their savings in their own security, in the advance of their technology, or even in establishing contacts with distant planets. They find it more interesting to trade amongst themselves than with the developing nations. Their markets and profit patterns are protected by tariff and non-tariff barriers. The efforts of the less developed countries to process their natural products and increase their share of international trade in manufactured and processed goods are thus frustrated. The continuous onslaught of synthetics and substitutes further deprives poor nations of the resources they could derive from the use of their products.

"Thus, the gap keeps growing. The technological and scientific advances achieved by industrial nations accelerate this process. While industrial nations naturally use their resources to improve their technology, developing nations do not have even the means to borrow it. Even so, modern technology offers to the developing nations the possibility of avoiding the earlier stages of development and thus overcoming the challenge of poverty."

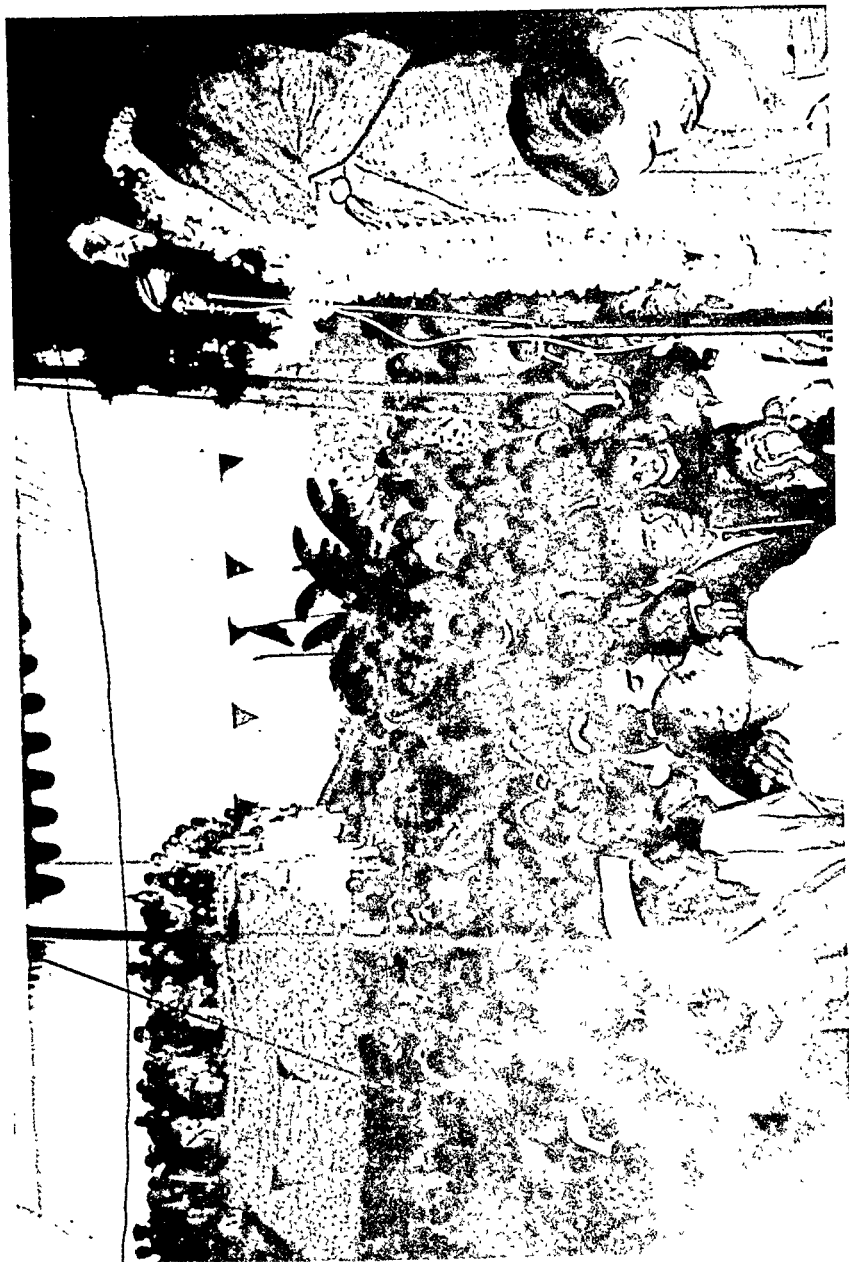
Finally, she placed the responsibility for correcting imbalances on the developed countries and warned that the consequences of failure were too terrible to contemplate. "The question before the advanced nations is not whether they can afford to help the developing nations, but whether they can afford not to do so."

She said : "Poverty corrodes the spirit of the poor and weakens their will to overcome it. The wealth of the prosperous grows in isolation and does not provide support to those who need it. The world economy has no built-in corrective. Economic processes must therefore be guided by a moral purpose and directed towards desirable ends by the political will of the international community. Otherwise only those nations which have inherited economic advantage from historical accidents can hope to achieve the maximum gains within the area of their political control.

"Responsibility for development must primarily be shouldered by the developing nations themselves. Political domination over the process of development by nations which wield economic power is inconsistent with the provisions of the Charter



Facing Pressmen and photographers during her Latin—American tour in 1968.



Addressing an election meeting in a U.P. village during the campaign for the mid-term poll.

to which we all subscribe. What we need is a global strategy of development, an integrated programme of international co-operation, which outlines convergent measures to be undertaken by every Member State.

“The elimination of poverty and the development of impoverished regions are now widely accepted as international obligations. In order to discharge them, it is imperative that the international community finds ways and means to intervene effectively in defining the responsibility of economic power, in matching resources to needs, and in guiding economic forces towards progress and peace.”

SHE BELIEVES...

WHETHER IT IS BECAUSE OF her own personality or because of the way she was chosen to be Prime Minister, people at large do not have a clear idea of her political and economic policies. Nor do they find her public image very much in focus. To many in the country she is still Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter more than anything else. Perhaps because of her own attitude of reserve little seems to have been done to present her as an individual and as a national leader. Here are her views on different subjects expressed at different times :

ON BEING A WOMAN PRIME MINISTER

Although I am in no sense a feminist, I happen to believe in the possibility of women being able to do everything. If a woman has qualifications and ability for any profession, she should be in it. A woman's work is more difficult than a man's because she has to look after the work as well as her home. I do not believe that a person who neglects the home can do other things well.

EXPERTS

The use of the expert is a major problem in public administration. I have no doubt that our present administrative system uses the expert inadequately and indifferently. It gives undue weight to the generalist and persists with criteria of competence developed in times when the range of government decisions was very limited and was unrelated to the demands of economic management and growth. Also, in the absence of responsible governments the official class developed a mystic both of infallibility and of transferability of talent.

STATUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Our administration is too status conscious. This is true of

our whole society. Seniority seems to be the rule of our national life. The creative young person does not always get the chances he merits. In certain branches of science and higher technology the most creative work is done at a young age. Bertrand Russell has remarked that he was at the height of his intellectual powers at twenty. Einstein did his greatest work when he was twenty-five. At the rate at which knowledge is growing, some of our elders in science and technology have not kept pace with new development. They are also not fully appreciative of the intimate relationship of higher technology and laboratory research. They cannot believe that young scientists might often be greater experts in specific fields than themselves.

BUREAUCRATIC ATTITUDE

Even engineers and doctors in our country are as prone as others develop the bureaucratic attitude. An eminent scientist once told me : "Your young scientists and engineers are very able people. They know exactly what is to be done. But they do not do it themselves, they ask others to do it." The officer mentality is also responsible for holding up progress. The hold of caste, not only in society but in government as developed in colonial days, feeds this outlook. Technology ought to have made a difference, but it did not.

DEMOCRACY

We have chosen the path of democracy because it gives the maximum opportunity for the growth of the individual, and for his participation in the affairs of the nation—in short it leads to political maturity. Maturity has been characterized as both the willingness and ability to accept responsibility. Democracy can only succeed if there is voluntary restraint and adjustment to the economic needs of the country. No political party can survive unless it can appreciate the viewpoint of the vast numbers of the under-privileged who affirm that no one has the right to demand the kind of life that pleases him, or even that which might give him the greatest scope for development, regardless of the needs of others.

ADMINISTRATION

In spite of numerous attempts at reform, the administration still tends to be hierarchical and status-bound. Pay and power are equated, instead of pay and utility. It is odd that the greatest doctors and engineers in the country, who would be rated as the leaders of the profession and who save lives or add permanent assets to the nation, can rarely hope to receive the pay or status of Secretaries of Ministries. The brightest of our young men and women choose engineering and medicine. If they happen to go into Government, they are very soon overtaken by the general administrator. This must change and I am trying to change it. The administrative system must reflect an individual's contribution to human welfare and economic gain.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

In foreign affairs, there are no set positions. Even if some countries have not always been very friendly to us in the past, I believe that where there is friendship we must enlarge it, where there is indifference we must remove it, and where there is hostility we should try to blunt it. What are permanent and set are certain values and interests on which we cannot compromise.

FREEDOM OF PRESS

The threat to a free Press comes not only from authority but from within itself. If journalists become too respectful towards power, whether economic or political, or, if they chase popularity and circulation to the neglect of professional integrity, then the liberty of the Press will be in trouble..... We should always defend the freedom of the Press because a free Press is a basic guarantee of democracy and, as Churchill called it 'the unsleeping guardian of every other right that free men prize' ...Let the Press do its duty as it sees it. I do not ask it to be impartial, for that would be itself a limitation to freedom of opinion. But let it not be too obsessed with the ephemeral and the trivial but take a longer and larger view of events. Again, I do not recommend any compulsory optimism to the Press. The Press has a right, as well as a duty, to point out faults, and to

attack pettiness and hypocrisy. But let it not undermine the confidence and spirit of the people, by speaking only of the failures, and not of the victories of the people as a whole...Freedom has often meant freedom for the big against the small. We have not solved the problem of how to secure the freedom of the small. This is true of our entire economy. It is true also of our Press.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Science and technology are no longer subjects merely to be studied in universities and technological institutes. They have become part of our lives, regardless of profession or inclination. The farmer in his field and the humble housewife in her home must also grapple with complicated machinery and problems of mechanics. In these circumstances, integrated education becomes all the more important. It is as dangerous to isolate scientific education from the humanities as it is to have purely non-technical education. Both should be related to national needs.

PHILOSOPHY

Today the gap between science and philosophy is lessening. The so-called arrogance of scientists is mellowed and akin to humility when they compare man's possibilities with the immensity of the universe. Susan Langer says, "the spearhead of scientific progress is philosophical imagination and pure rationality. The renaissance gave to physics and astronomy the impetus which carried them forward." There is therefore real need for philosophical work. Reason is to be cultivated not solely as a device for getting food or manufacturing gadgets but as a precision instrument for the use of high imaginations. Only thus will great thinkers arise.

INDEPENDENCE

Political independence is but a gateway through which a nation must pass before it can proceed with the work of ameliorating conditions and providing the fullest opportunities for the all-round development of its people. The real difficulties for a

nation begin only after freedom just as they do for a person when he attains adulthood.

ONE WORLD

The concept of one world is taking shape but as yet mostly in our minds. There is no effective international authority but neither is there complete national sovereignty anywhere. Nationalism is imperceptibly expanding into internationalism. As is natural, this is at first confined to the intelligentsia but due to the increasing demand for men and women of talent, the scholarships, exchange programme etc., international living is fast becoming a reality not only for the wealthy, but for people of all classes—business men and administrators, students and professors, scientists and technicians, social workers, writers and artists. How can society remain unmoved by this intermingling?

SOCIAL CHANGE

Nothing is static in the universe. The Vedas, the fountain-head of our ancient wisdom, teach us that change is a law of life. A present-day psychologist would phrase it differently—'Life is a continuous series of adjustment to reality, the more readily a person is able to adapt himself to changing conditions; the more meaningful will become his own existence.' But even as the externals of our life and times keep changing, the external values remain constant and steadfast, and it is to these that we must anchor our actions and our beliefs.

CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS

Some people are determined to show that there are very many difficulties but their desire is that the States should have more powers. I assure you that we do not grudge the States more powers or more authority. But in a country of India's size, especially since the last election which demonstrated that every State can have an entirely different type of government, you can understand that if every State is going to go its own way, then it will be exceedingly difficult to have a unified India. And as it is each State has autonomy in a very large number of important

sections. We have certainly had difficulties between us, but we have not had more difficulties between non-Congress States and us than with Congress States. What is the major difficulty : It is : 'Please give us more money, please give us more industry, please give us more projects and so on.' And all of them are desirable and should be had and the only difficulty is that they can stretch their hands into our pockets, but whose pocket can we pick !

BRAIN DRAIN

In modern science team work counts for as much as individual genius. The individual creates and transforms his environment to some extent, but he is also the creature of environment. While we should strive with determination and tenacity to improve our research institutions and to rid ourselves of archaic administrative systems, we should not forget that we cannot yet provide everything required by talented scientists doing advanced work in various branches of knowledge. Even countries which are far more advanced than we are facing the problem of this exodus of junior scientists as well as of leaders of research. The more outstanding of them are men who have a full measure of their creative ability and of the contribution which they can make to knowledge. They are not tempted by the ordinary blandishments but want to leave their mark on a branch of science, want to contribute and also to learn further, and I think that their concern is with frontiers of knowledge and therefore they do not feel bound by national boundaries.

SCIENCE AND OFFICIALDOM

The time has come, if it is not already too late, when we must make an all-out effort to break the bonds of defeatism which envelop science in India. Many of our scientists working within the country and some working abroad are rated amongst world leaders and can be the pride and adornment of any institution. We must do our utmost to give them the best deal by creating conditions where they can give their own best to the country and the world. There is no time to lose. Much despondency is due to our pattern of administration in which the scientist is

subordinated to the bureaucrat. But I must admit that sometimes when a person joins Government he himself does not remain free from the limiting outlook of the bureaucracy. This climate is something which can be changed by decisive action on the part of the Government and also scientists themselves. Government is certainly to blame and the responsibility must rest very much on them. But I do not think that you can leave it entirely to Government. Achievement in our conditions takes three or four times more effort than in advanced countries. We have all to fight the forces of inertia and resistance and it is only when we make this sort of effort when some people are willing to face the challenge and suffer the difficulties and frustrations, that we shall be able to make headway.

STUDENT UNREST

It would be neither right nor fair to our students to say that all students indulge in demonstrations or any kind of disorder. Demonstrations or other activities, which are sometimes anti-social or sometimes are not desirable, do take place. I would not say that they are more in India than in other countries in the world. Today anything that happens anywhere is due to certain specific problems in that place and also are part of certain worldwide phenomena. We are not separate from the world. But it is true that we have certain specific problems which are ours. Students in the United States or somewhere else agitate, may agitate against an attitude of Government or Government policy. They also have the problem of affluence. We in India have our own specific problems, for instance, the very rapid expansion in education, without corresponding expansion in the things which students need. We do have schools and colleges which are not fully equipped with playgrounds, hostels or very many other things. We have science laboratories which are not fully equipped. So there are certain real and specific grievances which students have. But they also are part of the world student community. They read various things or they get in touch with what is happening in other countries. We can't blame them for reacting against a situation which they may consider unfair to them.

SELF-HELP

There was a very poor villager who lived on the dole of other villagers. Then a small patch of land which had never been cultivated, full of thorns, stones and weeds, was found and the villagers said to him. 'Here is this land. If you can grow something, it is yours.' The poor man struggled very hard, worked night and day, and finally he was able to grow something on it. The village priest who was passing by said : 'John, you and God together have done wonderful work here.' And John said : 'That is right, Sir, but you should have seen this land when God alone was looking after it.'

SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION

Recently I saw a play in which a fiddler was precariously balanced on the top of a roof and another actor commented that it was tradition which enabled the fiddler to remain on such a perch. But tradition does not mean merely the ability to stay put. The best tradition is not just the past. Tradition is that part of the past which lives on in the present and enables a people to renew themselves to face the challenge of the future. In India a large part of our community life and almost all our celebrations are still concerned with the past. Much of the time we seem to be looking backward rather than ahead. The future cannot be built on the past but on our present effort. Does this mean that one should cut oneself adrift from spiritual anchorage? On the contrary I believe that it is only through a creative fusion of science with spirituality and the deep and abiding values of our philosophy that we can survive and prosper. But spirituality and philosophy should not be confused with superstition. There are scientists I am told who regard science in India as if it were a coat to be put on in the laboratory or in the office and taken off when you go home. I was told that some years ago there was a professor of physics, who taught astronomy, and who on certain holy days took a special bath so that Rahu would not swallow the Sun ! These are attitudes which scientists and engineers challenge and fight against.

RESEARCH AND INDUSTRY

Life is not lived in compartments, nor can all-round development take place if it is so viewed. The solution of contemporary problems involves many spheres of activity. We must therefore encourage the cross fertilization of views, experience and data, and also promote inter-action between different disciplines. The sustained and combined efforts of different groups of scientists would give a tremendous forward thrust to any programme. In the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, scientists and industrialists have a forum where they can discuss problems of mutual interest. But it is equally desirable for industry to participate actively in the research and design programmes of our laboratories, so that the projects undertaken and successfully completed, make a more effective impact on production. It would be helpful to have an exchange of personnel between universities, national laboratories and industry. As a people, we tend to be individualistic in our outlook, and perhaps our scientists and technologists are not wholly immune from this tendency, often preferring to work by themselves.

INDIAN FARMER

Visible benefit makes the most immediate impact. When individuals or groups are convinced that the adoption of modern science and technology will increase their income or strength, they jettis on old beliefs for new ideas and methods. The Indian farmer has often been accused of resisting change. This charge is somewhat unjust. Did he not in the last century take to growing crops which were strange to our country, such as tobacco and groundnuts? The cultivation of these imported crops was taken up even by small farmers because it meant more and readier money. A similar change is again taking place with the introduction of high-yielding crop varieties. So, while tradition and superstition do block progress, we should not underrate the strong pull of modernity and of self-interest.

LANGUAGE PROBLEM

If India, or the Parliament could decide that Tamil would

be the link language I would be very happy. But it is not a question of my views. Because I have learned a number of languages, it is easier for me to learn other languages. But it is not so easy for the peasants to learn new languages. And when we talk of communication between people, I do not mean a few educated people in towns and cities, but I mean all the people, whether they live in the villages, in the rural areas, whether they work in factories, or anywhere else. Now why was Hindi or Hindustani chosen? Not because it is a better language, but because it will serve that purpose, since large numbers of people already speak it, and still large numbers understand it. It would, therefore, be easier for the fewer people to learn it. If we were to teach Tamil, it would mean teaching it to a very much larger population. That is why we had to choose one language as a link language which will link the people of all the States together. Similarly, we also have to have a language which will link our country with the other countries of the world. Before the last World War, many languages were spoken in different countries. But today we see that more and more countries are taking to English as their second language. Some months ago we had a visit to our country of the President of Finland, which is a very small country. Before the War they had two compulsory languages, Finnish and Swedish. Now they have also added English. So, in that small country, everybody, every child, has to learn three languages, Finnish, Swedish and English. This is the case with most countries in the world today.

CHILD WELFARE

Child welfare is the work nearest to my heart. What a joy it is to watch the young spirit grow and develop its own individuality. As I tour about the country and see the hundreds of laughing, cheering children crowding the roadsides and the schools and other institutions that I visit, I am filled with gladness at this potential wealth which is ours. But it is a gladness tinged with sorrow that we cannot yet give to all our children the opportunities and facility for better education, health and recreation which are their due.

ARCHITECTURE

We are constructing buildings which are neither functionary nor attractive. Already we have thoughtlessly desecrated the environs of many archaeological monuments by putting up sheds and shelters which are out of harmony with the spirit and the landscape of the place. Many of the memorials we build for our great are no tribute to our taste or judgments. We are encroaching upon open spaces within and outside our cities. Architecture is the most public of all arts. Let us build well not merely because people dwell and work in these houses and offices, but because we commit the coming generation to what we build now. Our design for development should avoid the more dehumanising effects which tend to accompany urban and industrial growth. Development does not mean limitation of the patterns of living of affluent societies. Our aim should be to provide the bulk of our people a minimum of material goods and services which are also aesthetically satisfying. Development cannot and should not neglect the spirit.

MUSIC

Music is essential for the full and harmonious development of one's personality and it should form part of one's education. The necessity for this is even more evident in those days when modern civilization is becoming increasingly materialistic. The world is maturing technologically but is still an adolescent spiritually. Our changing society is placing greater responsibility on the man in the street. In olden days, in India as well as other countries, music could develop and flourish because individual musicians were encouraged by wealthy patrons. Music and art were the monopoly of courts. Those days are gone and today our musicians and artists must justify themselves to the public and must depend upon them for appreciation and support. It is only when music becomes a part of everybody's education that the people can become true patrons of art. Not all of us can become musicians but we can learn to appreciate good music.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The need for national integration does not arise merely from a moral purpose. Certainly the moral purpose is there but in the world as it exists today, as it is evolving today, national integration is the very condition of our national survival. It is a practical necessity if we are to go forward with our development plans and to progress in unity and strength. It is only in the measure that we recognize this fact that we can evoke a mood in the entire country to address ourselves to an effective solution of the problem. At times these problems seem insuperable but the entire story of modern India is one of overcoming of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. No thinking person should wish to weaken the unity of the country. I am convinced that the forces of integration are strong but they do need to be united and to be given some guidance. We must find a way harnessing the basic decency, the basic commonsense of the average citizen in order to overcome these forces which threaten his future and the future of his children.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

Ours is a country in which opposites coexist and contradictions thrive, and nowhere is this more so than as regards women. If we have women who are among the most progressive in the world, we also have women who are among the most backward. In law all discrimination between man and woman has been abolished. Yet we all know the social and economic hardships which our women suffer in addition to the general hardships which any individual suffers in a society so poor and still so largely mediaeval as ours. In countries where women had to fight for their right, this fight had the added advantage of making the men accept the fact of women's emancipation. In India, the emancipation of women, or the possibility of it, has released greater momentum amongst women because it has meant the release from complete subjection; yet the non-acceptance of their equality with men is a great handicap and a hurdle. Along with that is women's own age-long concept of the silently suffering Sita which remains the ideal at the back of even the most liberated women's mind and becomes a source of conflict. Our laws have

changed, and changed with tremendous speed. As in other fields we have compressed several centuries of evolution into a couple of generations. The danger is that social laws are ahead of actual practice. There is a lag between the legislation on women's rights and the social sanctions required to make the legislation a reality. This is certainly true in terms of the status of women. The major task of educated Indian women today is to make actuality catch up with opportunity opened by law.

THE WORKING GIRL

It is unlikely that in 1916 there were more than a dozen women graduates in each of our States, except perhaps Bombay, Bengal and Madras. Last year we had 300,000 girls in colleges. Until two decades ago, teaching, nursing and medicine were the only professions open to educated women. Today they are research scientists, engineers and district magistrates. I am told that one-fourth of the total research staff of the Tata Cancer Research Institute consists of women. The working girl has come into her own.

FAMILY PLANNING

Educated women should regard family planning as their own problem. It is their duty to organize the matching voluntary effort which alone will enable the government programme to succeed. Women's organizations should take up the task of door-to-door and village-to-village canvassing of family planning. The movement now requires the same intense zeal and dedication that Vidyasagar, Deodhar and Karve brought to the upliftment of widows and to the education of girls.

INDIAN UNITY

Foreigners are not the best judges to what is happening in India, neither in what they admire nor what they criticize. The speculation on Indian unity is an old pastime. Some maintain

that the British unified India. This is one of the half-truths propagated by half-historians. The condition in which the British left the princely States when they had withdrawn shows that they did not unify India either by design or in a fit of absent-mindedness. Real unity came through opposition to British rule—through nationalism and through the democratic process. It is the latter which did away with the princely States and ushered in uniformity of law. The nationalist impulse is still very much with us. Four general elections have been possible because the world's largest electorate has discovered that it has a stake in democracy. It is true that political power and influence have not spread uniformly amongst all classes. But have they in any country? The Indian people have become truly political, and having known the power that democracy gives them, I am sure they will not tolerate any system of paternalistic or elite government.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BORN IN ALLAHABAD ON NOVEMBER 19, 1917, Indira grew up in an atmosphere of intense political activity. According to herself, her "childhood games were political ones". Her schooling was interrupted again and again because of the family's frequent imprisonment. In 1923 she joined St. Cecilia's School in Allahabad. Three years later she went to Switzerland with her parents and attended schools in Geneva and Bex. On return to India next year she joined St. Mary's Convent in Allahabad and began to learn Hindi from a tutor at home. After the death of her grandfather, Motilal Nehru, in 1931 she was sent by her father to Pupils' Own School in Poona. At the age of 16 she passed her matriculation examination.

In a short article written in 1959 on "My Sixteenth Year" Mrs. Gandhi said : "My sixteenth year was greeted by the not unusual occurrence of my father's arrest. He sent a telegram—'going to other home'. My mother was ill. I was troubled and anxious but was occupied with my studies and dance practice, for I took my matric exam. just then and made a brief appearance for the only time on the stage of a regular theatre.

"When I left for good, practically the entire school, including some parents, accompanied me on the suburban train to say good-bye at Victoria Terminus. Old songs were sung amidst mingled tears and laughter.

"I had wanted to be a boy but at 16 the delight of being a woman began to unfold itself and almost overnight, the long-legged tomboy in frocks changed into a sari-clad young lady. I came to Calcutta to be with my mother and to share with her the unsatisfactory but greatly treasured 20-minute fortnightly interview with my father. Mummy and I spent much time in the Ramakrishana Math. Sitting peacefully by the riverside, a new world of thought and experience opened out to me.

"Soon afterwards, I joined Visvabharati. Painfully shy with strangers, I was rather overawed by Gurudev's magnificent presence. Never would I have dared to encroach upon his time, had he himself not complained of negligence ! He kept close

watch on all of us and seemed to be aware of all cross currents in the institution. Many were the evenings when a small group of us sat at his feet and talked on diverse subjects, or silently watched him paint. Often he would recite or read aloud. These were moments of serene joy, memories to cherish.

"My grandmother tried to get me engaged but this hazard was avoided thanks to Mummy's staunch support. Amongst other proposals of marriage came one from my husband and another from a stranger which had us laughing for days—but that is another story!"

In 1935, she left Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's Visvabharati University at Santiniketan to accompany her sick mother to Europe for treatment. She was with her mother in Lausanne in Switzerland when she died in 1936. In 1938 she was admitted to Badminton School in Bristol, England, and later to Oxford University.

As a child in Allahabad, she organized a children's section of Mahatma Gandhi's Charkha Sangh and at the age of 12 formed what was called Vanar Sena (Monkey Brigade) to help in the civil disobedience movement. The organization had about 6,000 members in Allahabad and branches in Bombay and some other cities. Its members carried messages, cooked food for Congress volunteers, gave them first aid when they were injured in police lathi charges, and made and hung national flags.

Why did she organize this Monkey Brigade? This is how she tells the story: "I did that in a fit of temper! I was 12 years old at the time, and I wanted to be a member of the Congress Party, but they turned me down. They said I would have to be 18 or 21 or something like that, and I was exceedingly angry, and I said: 'I will have an organization of my own!' And that's how it began. My father didn't even know about it until I had completed all the preliminaries."

"At our first meeting", she recalls, "there were several thousand children. In those days, we didn't have loudspeakers in India. And obviously I couldn't yell to a meeting of that magnitude. So we had human loudspeakers. Just as you might have a translation of your speech, I would say one sentence, and the human loudspeakers would bellow it forth in succession and so on.

"Well, the people had looked upon us condescendingly when the whole idea was mooted. But after a while, they were not so condescending, because we really did quite a tough job. We took over from the adult members all those activities that could not be done by other people, which left them free to do the more difficult work. We took over the writing of notices, addressing of envelopes, making flags, cooking, giving water to people and carrying messages."

Explaining what the carrying of messages involved she says : "Sometimes a house might be surrounded by the police, and you couldn't send out a message. But nobody bothered about an urchin hopping in and out of the police lines. Nobody thought that he could be doing anything. Well, the boy would memorize the message and go to the people concerned and say : 'You know, this is to be done or not done. All the police are there. So and so is going to be arrested' or whatever the news was.

"In a similar way, we also acted as an intelligence group, because frequently the policemen, sitting in front of the police station, would talk about what was going on—who was to be arrested, where there would be a raid, and so on. And four or five children playing hopscotch outside would attract no one's attention. And they would deliver this news to the people in the movement."

She was sent to Poona and Santiniketan by Jawaharlal Nehru because he did not want her to develop a parochial attitude. He was also keen that she should learn Indian languages other than Hindi and see how people lived in different parts of India. When in prison he feared that her education might be neglected. So he wrote to her 30 letters on pre-history in 1928. This series was later published as 'Letters from a Father to His Daughter'. In 1930 he started another series published as 'Glimpses of World History'. They were written between 1930 and 1933.

Having been actively involved in the freedom struggle from early childhood (her first visit to Mahatma Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati was at the age of five), it was natural that she should have joined the Congress at a young age. She became a member of the national organization in 1938 and in August, 1942, she was present when the All India Congress Committee passed the Quit India resolution in Bombay. In March the same year, she married Feroze Gandhi, and it was as a bride that she was

arrested on September 10, 1942, and kept in prison until May 13, 1943.

Mrs. Gandhi as has often been questioned about her wedding. Recently when an interviewer asked if there had been any selectivity on her father's part in choosing Mr. Feroze Gandhi, her reply was : "No. On the contrary. The whole nation was against this wedding."

Explaining the reason, she said : "Because he was of a different religion, you see. He was a Parsi. And the whole background was so different that although my father never said anything one way or the other, in the beginning he was not very happy. But others were very much against it. And the whole country was against it.

Q. : The Press ?

A. : Well, the Press—no, not the Press so much, but the general public. I was getting hundreds of letters every day threatening—abusing—all kinds of things. Of course, a very few encouraging, saying "Good for you !"

Q. : But they must have tightened your resolve.

A. : Well, I don't think—you know, I am rather balanced in this way. If I know what I want, it doesn't bother me if somebody opposes it. It neither tightens nor loosens, you see. I go my way. And once I had made up my mind, there it was.

But this was the reason we had to have a bigger wedding than I otherwise would have had. This was the only point on which I gave in. We had thought that we would have a very quiet affair and not invite anybody. But Mahatma Gandhi rightly pointed out that, under any other circumstances, he himself would want that; but with a wedding as controversial as this people would think that my father didn't want to do anything for my husband and me, and this, he said, would not be fair to my father or to us. So that's why we had a wedding—I won't say in the "grand manner," because compared to Indian weddings it was still very very simple, but nevertheless a lot of people turned up from all over India.

Q. : And what was the immediate public reaction after the ceremony ?

A. : Well, as I said, enlightened people felt it was a good thing and there should be more mixed marriages—and the fanatical fringe continued with their objections.

What happened after the wedding relates to the Quit India movement. Mrs. Gandhi has painted a vivid picture of her part in the movement, her arrest and of the time she spent in jail. In an article entitled 'A Page From the Book of Memory' she wrote in 1963 :

On the 9th August, 1942, the pre-dawn arrests of our leaders launched the Quit India Movement and I had my first experience of a tear gas attack at the flag hoisting ceremony. My husband decided to go underground, doing propaganda and other work. He grew a moustache and dressed in khaki. Because of his complexion, which was fair and ruddy, he passed off as an Anglo-Indian soldier. On his journey from Bombay, he got off at a small wayside station, thinking that he was too well-known in Allahabad to risk being seen at the station, even in disguise. No conveyance was available and finally he hitched a ride from a truck full of British and Anglo-Indian soldiers, who were scared stiff and almost refused to let him get off again, saying that the damned natives would hack him to pieces if they found him alone and unarmed !

Swaraj Bhavan was occupied by the military, and next door in Anand Bhavan we had the unattractive sight of a row of guns aimed at us from across the garden wall. Our servants, mostly villagers, were naturally terrified and found it difficult to reply to the curt : "Halt ! Who goes there ?" every time they approached the wall.

There was a warrant for Shastriji's arrest. Acting on the assumption that no one would ever guess that he could be rash enough to stay in Anand Bhavan, he did just that and remained with us incognito until he could make full arrangements for the work of the movement to go on. He could not come out of his room until after dark and food was taken up to him surreptitiously. We pretended we had an ailing relative. This situation could hardly be maintained for long without the news leaking out. Besides, there was always the danger of a search, so Shastriji had to move and was arrested within a short time.

We were hedged in on all sides and it was well nigh impossible for workers to get together. My husband became

one of the links through whom I could pass on money and political literature to other underground workers and we had to arrange to meet briefly and late at night in the houses of different non-political friends.

Then came information that I was to be arrested. Until then I had tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible but I did not feel like going to jail so tamely. So I hastily packed some clothes and books and went to stay elsewhere. Whispers from ear to ear spread the news of a public meeting at 5. Police swarmed all over the city for they could not discover the whereabouts of the meeting. At the scheduled time I emerged and crowds of people poured out from all sides, from the cinema house, the shops and nearby houses where they had been collecting for some hours.

I had hardly spoken for 10 minutes when truck-loads of armed British military drove up and formed a cordon around us. My husband had decided not to get involved and was looking down at us through the shutters of a first-floor window. However, at the sight of a gun barrel, just a yard away from my head, excitement and anxiety got the better of him and he came charging down, yelling at the sergeant to shoot or to lower his gun. The sergeant made the mistake of touching my arm to lead me to the prison van. It was like a signal; the crowd surged forth; my other arm was grabbed by some Congress women and I thought I would torn asunder. Somehow we all survived.

There was no firing though rifle butts were used and many were hurt. A large number of us, men and women, including my husband and I, were arrested. The ride to the jail was rather an extraordinary one, for police in my van were apparently so moved by my talking to them that they apologized, put their turbans at my feet and wept their sorrow because of what their job compelled them to do !

Since earliest childhood I had visited jails either for trials of relations and friends or for unsatisfactory but highly-treasured 20-minute interviews. People have heard of my parents' imprisonments but it is not often realized what a large number of relatives, both on my father's and mother's side—offhand I can think of two dozen names but there were probably more—spent long years in prison. I do not

know of any other family which was so involved in the freedom struggle and its hardships.

What a world of difference there is between hearing and seeing from the outside and the actual experience. No one who has not been in prison for any length of time can even visualize the numbness of spirit that can creep over one when, as Oscar Wilde writes, "each day is like a year, a year whose days are long," when day after day is wrapped in sameness and in spite and deliberate humiliation. Pethick-Lawrence said : "The essential fact in the life of the prisoner is that he takes on a sub-human status." Herded together like animals, devoid of dignity or privacy, debarred not only from outside company or news but from all beauty and colour, softness and grace. The ground, the walls, everything around us was mud coloured and so became our jail-washed clothes; even our food tasted gritty.

Through the barred apertures we were exposed to the loo and dust-storms, the monsoon downpour and the winter cold. Others had an interview and a letter once or twice a month but not I. My husband was in the same prison. After persistent efforts we were permitted a short interview but soon he was transferred to another town. I kept cheerful and busy, reading and teaching. I took over the entire care of a small baby whose mother I was teaching to enable her to earn her living on her release.

There was no yearning for the outside world, for no one worthwhile was there. Besides, we had convinced ourselves that we were in for seven years. I was determined to bear all privations and insults smilingly. Many pictures come to mind. The visit of the Civil Surgeon sent by the Governor of the U.P., in view of the public concern over my ill-health. He prescribed a tonic and a special diet, including delicacies such as Ovaltine. But hardly was his back turned when the Superintendent tore up the list and tossed the pieces on the floor. "If you think you are getting any of this," he said, "you are mistaken". This was surprising for I had not asked for anything. Even the Surgeon's visit was unexpected.

One night we were started out of sleep by a blood-curdling shriek. Although Zohra was the nastiest and most un-

popular of our warderesses, we could sympathize with her terror and agitation, for there was an enormous cobra only a yard from our bars, coiled under one of the clocks which the warderess had to punch on her rounds. So apart from the imminent danger of snake-bite there was the legitimate fear of losing her job. We were locked inside the barrack and she within the outer wall. There was no stick or other weapon.

Zohra's shouts, now frightened, now exasperated, now bullying, now entreating, did nothing to shake the calm of the sentry outside, who wanted detailed information regarding the exact location of the snake, specifications of its length and breadth and so on. "Are Kambakht"! (O you unfortunate one) shouted Zohra. "Have I got a tailor's tape to measure it from head to tail?"

It was several hours before the sentry could be persuaded to call the matron. Her house was three furlongs away and she in turn had to walk to the Superintendent's house to awaken him, before they could go together to the main office to fetch the key to the women's prison. By the time this little procession entered our enclosure, we had long since fallen philosophically asleep and the snake had glided away.

Another day, we barely escaped being burnt to death. It was wartime and the cantonment was crowded with not only British but Americans and Canadians as well. A Canadian ace pilot was smitten by our Superintendent's attractive daughter. Once he was flying low over her house, as was his wont, when his wing touched a telegraph wire and burst into flames. We saw it falling towards us at an alarming speed but it just skirted the jail wall and dashed into a half-built bungalow not far away.

All things pass and so did this. My unexpected release was like coming suddenly out of a dark passage. I was dazzled with the rush of life, the many hues and textures, the scale of sounds and the range of ideas. Just to touch and listen was a disturbing experience and it took a while to get adjusted to normal living.

Her first son, Rajiv, was born in Bombay in 1944 and the second, Sanjay, in 1946. The following year she was called

upon by Mahátma Gandhi to work in areas affected by communal riots.

Though largely preoccupied with her duties as the hostess in the Prime Minister's house from 1947 onwards she continued to take interest in Congress affairs. In 1955 she became a member of the Congress Working Committee and took charge of the Women's Department and the Youth Section. In 1959 she was elected President of the Congress. Her husband died in 1960.

What does Mrs. Gandhi think of herself as a politician? When she was Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the Shastri Cabinet an interviewer had a long discussion with her. Here are some questions and answers.

INTERVIEWER : MRS. GANDHI, you not only had been a close colleague of your father's ever since Indian independence, you also were elected President of the Congress Party in 1959. Because of this, many people throughout the world regard you as a highly successful politician. Vice-President Humphrey does, as a matter of fact, and referred to you recently as a politician of considerable magnitude. And then he joked about it because he said you had taken offence at that and proclaimed that you were not a politician. With his own gift for political insight, and I'm sure with a touch of envy, he again stated that you were a political force of rare attainment. The fact that you took a post in the Government as Minister of Information and Broadcasting, I am sure, added to his evaluation which naturally adds further to speculation as to what direction you might undertake in the future.

MRS. GANDHI : Well, I don't really know, because nobody has control over circumstances, and India at the moment is in a particularly critical period. My father had a unique advantage of having within him all parts of India. I mean, he could be at ease with the old, with the very young, with the peasant, with the thinker and with all other aspects of our people. And that contributed greatly, I think, to the unity of India.

Now, although unity, in the political sense, is still there, today you do find a slight division between the politician and say, the intelligentsia—between the young generation and the older generation. I don't know how this is going to be bridged, or whether anybody can bridge it, or whether it's just a matter of

time. I mean, all the older generation after all are on the way out—physically, I mean. So maybe it's just a question of time when this thing will settle on its own. But, at the moment, there are all these forces, and it is very difficult to say just what they will produce.

INTERVIEWER : But your experience and role are unique and you must be objective about it at this point. A great deal of responsibility goes along with that, and I know you must feel that responsibility—the experience that accrued to you partly because of your circumstance in being the daughter of so eminent a father, but also because of your particular talents and what you had to bring to that situation. The fact that you were a daughter and not a son makes it even more interesting, because had you been a son, I wonder how many fewer difficulties you think you might have encountered in being a colleague.

MRS. GANDHI : Or more.

INTERVIEWER : Or more, that's true.

MRS. GANDHI : I think there probably would have been more difficulties because, firstly, I could not have really remained with him and helped him in the way that I have. I would have had to make a living, or something like that. That would have created an entirely new situation. I think the political world also would have been much more sensitive to the situation and wary of it.

INTERVIEWER : In terms of any male successor ?

MRS. GANDHI : Yes.

INTERVIEWER : But I'm sure you must have dealt with these thoughts, because history plays such funny tricks on us. Here we all come into consciousness of life without having been asked to share the adventure. We suddenly find ourselves on the stage, and many of us cast into seemingly impossible roles. I'm sure that oftentimes you've thought no role has been more impossible than your own.

MRS. GANDHI : I think so. But, on the whole, I have so rarely had time to sit back and think about the role, or anything else, that I have just been moving from job to job.

INTERVIEWER : One of the unforgettable moments in your life, I'm sure, must have been at midnight when August 14, 1947, came to an end, and August 15 came in. This was the occasion when your father made his first speech to the new and free

Parliament of India.

MRS. GANDHI : Well, I was so excited and proud, you know, I really thought I would burst !

INTERVIEWER : As an Indian, or as a daughter ?

MRS. GANDHI : Well, I think it was really all mixed up. I can't really, separate the two personalities. But more as an Indian, I think, because of having taken part in the struggle and to feel it was worth it.

INTERVIEWER : One of the remarkable things in history, I believe, is the result of that 30-year struggle for independence from the British. And that is the participation of the British in the independence ceremonies, and the attitude which you Indians, who had fought them so bitterly and for so long, now hold.

MRS. GANDHI : Well, even when we were fighting them, Mahatma Gandhi had always stressed one point, and this was that our battle was not with the British people but only with the system of colonialism. And therefore, even at the height of the struggle, the British were always welcome in our homes. They could walk the streets of our towns without anybody harming them in any way at all.

But after independence, it helped considerably that we had a family like the Mountbattens at the helm of affairs because they were exceedingly perceptive. They were very friendly to us—as a family personally, but to India as a country, too. And I think it was very much due to this gracious approach that things could go smoothly.

INTERVIEWER : Well, Admiral Lord Mountbatten was the last Viceroy, and certainly a friend of India's, as you have said. But then, there were other figures, like the late and lamented Sir Winston Churchill, who, during the long part of his life, could be considered anything but a friend of the Indian nationalists.

MRS. GANDHI : Oh, he was very much against Indian nationalism, and he said some very harsh things about Mahatma Gandhi and my father and the whole movement. But when Indian independence came, he bowed to the inevitable, and he was a friend after that. In fact, at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, we happened to be sitting together, and he suddenly said, "Isn't it strange that we should be talking as friends when

we hated each other such a short while ago ? I said, "Sir Winston, we didn't hate you." And he said, "But I did !" He added, however, "But I don't now !" And on another occasion, he was talking about my father to someone, and he characterized him as the man who had conquered hatred and fear. And I think that that is a very big compliment.

Recently the French, according to a poll conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion, declared Mrs. Gandhi as "the most admired woman". She was given this position in 1968 for the second year in succession. Earlier, she won recognition in other fields. She received the Mothers' Award of the U.S.A. in 1953, the Howland Memorial Prize of Yale University in 1960 and the Italian Isabella D'Este for outstanding work in the field of diplomacy in 1965.

After the Chinese aggression in 1962, Mrs. Gandhi coordinated civil defence efforts as Chairman of the Citizens' Council. She has for long been taking keen interest in child welfare. Her other interests include music and dance, both folk and classical, and bird watching.

She was elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in January 1966, and re-elected on March 12, 1967. In the 1967 general election she was returned to the Lok Sabha from Rae Bareli in U.P.

CHRONOLOGY OF MAIN EVENTS IN MRS. INDIRA GANDHI'S LIFE

Nov. 19, 1917	Born in Allahabad.
Dec. 6, 1921	First arrest of father, Jawaharlal Nehru.
Dec. 7, 1921	Sits in lap of grandfather, Motilal Nehru, as he is tried in court for defiance of British laws.
1922	Visit to Gandhi Ashram at Sabarmati.
1923	Admitted to St. Cecilia's School at Allahabad.
March 1926	Accompanied parents to Europe for mother's treatment.
	Admitted to schools in Geneva and Bex.
1927	After return to India in December was admitted to St. Mary's Convent in Allahabad. A tutor was appointed to teach her Hindi at home.
1928	Started children's section of Mahatma Gandhi's Charkha Sangh.
1928	Received letters (30 in number) from Jawaharlal Nehru on pre-history, later published as "Letters from a Father to His Daughter."
1930	Organized Vanar Sena (Monkey Brigade).
Oct. 13, 1930	Jawaharlal Nehru and wife join Indira for a brief holiday at Mussoorie where Motilal was recuperating.
Oct. 26, 1930	First letter from Jawaharlal Nehru in the series "Glimpses of World History" (Oct. 1930 to Aug. 1933).
Jan. 1, 1931	Kamala Nehru's arrest.
Feb. 2, 1931	Death of Motilal Nehru at Lucknow.
April, 23, 1931	Holiday in Ceylon with parents, visit to Southern India.
May, 1931	Admitted to Pupils' Own School at Poona run by Jehangir Jiwaji Vakil and his wife Cooverbai.

- April 1934 Passes Matriculation Examination.
 July 1934 Admitted in Visvabharati, Santiniketan.
 April 13, 1935 Discontinued education at Santiniketan to accompany mother to Europe.
 May 23, 1935 Sailed from Bombay to Europe with mother.
 June 17, 1935 Reached Badenweiler, Bavaria.
 Sept. 9, 1935 Jawaharlal Nehru joins Kamala and Indira in Switzerland.
 Feb. 28, 1936 Kamala Nehru's death at Lausanne.
 May 1937 Visit to Malaysia, Burma and Singapore.
 May 1937 Accompanied father to France, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.
 1938 Became member of the Indian National Congress.
 Feb. 1938 Admission to Badminton School, Bristol.
 1938 Admission to Oxford. Was member of China Committee during Sino-Japanese War.
 Sept. 6, 1938 Visited Germany.
 March 1939 Went to Switzerland for treatment.
 1941 Returned to London via France, Spain and Portugal.
 Returned from England to Bombay via South Africa.
 March, 26, 1942 Marriage with Feroze Gandhi.
 Aug. 8, 1942 Attended A.I.C.C. session in Bombay where 'Quit India' Resolution was adopted.
 Sept. 10, 1942 Arrested in Allahabad.
 May 13, 1943 Released from prison.
 Aug. 20, 1944 Birth of Rajiv in Bombay.
 Dec. 14, 1946 Birth of Sanjay.
 May 1947 Moved to Delhi to be with father.
 Relief work during August 1947 at the behest of Gandhiji.
 Jan. 29, 1948 Last meeting with Gandhiji.
 1953 First visit to Soviet Union.
 April 1953 Visit to Indonesia for Bandung Conference.
 1953 Received Mother's Award in U.S.A.
 Sept. 20, 1954 Child Welfare Centre started in Teen Murti, with 50 children.
 Oct. 1954 Visit to China, Indonesia, Malaysia.

- Feb. 1955 Appointed member of Congress Working Committee.
- Sept. 19, 1955 Member, Central Election Committee of the Congress.
- Sept. 22, 1956 Made President of Allahabad City Congress.
- Feb. 23, 1958 Member, Central Parliamentary Board, in place of Jawaharlal Nehru (other members, besides President Dhebar, G. B. Pant, Morarji Desai and Jagjivan Ram.)
- Feb. 2, 1959 Elected as Congress President.
- Feb. 8, 1959 Assumed office as President of the Indian National Congress to succeed U. N. Dhebar.
- April 24, 1959 Commenced tour of Kerala to study conditions.
- July 31, 1959 Communist regime in Kerala dismissed by President.
- Dec. 1959 Inaugurated election campaign in Kerala.
- Jan. 1960 Bangalore session of Congress—Sanjiva Reddy takes over as President from Indira Gandhi.
- Sept. 8, 1960 Death of Feroze Gandhi.
- Nov. 11, 1960 Received Howland Memorial Prize at Yale University, U.S.A.
- Nov. 18, 1960 Elected member of UNESCO Executive Board in Paris.
- Aug. 1961 Visit to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rhodesia.
- Nov. 2, 1962 Broadcast message to nation on Chinese aggression.
- Jan. 19, 1963 Chairman, Central Citizens' Committee.
- Dec. 8-30 1963 Visit to Tanzania, Rhodesia, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya and U.A.R.
- April 1964 Participates in inauguration of New York World's Fair.
- May 27, 1964 Death of Jawaharlal Nehru.
- July 2, 1964 Appointed Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the Cabinet of Lal Bahadur Shastri.
- July 22, 1964 Returned from London after Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference.

- Aug. 20, 1964 Elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha.
1965 Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi.
- Jan. 1955 Visit to Madras during language riots.
- Nov. 23, 1965 Awarded Isabella d'Este prize in Rome.
- Jan. 10, 1966 Death of Lal Bahadur Shastri at Tashkent.
- Jan. 19, 1966 Elected leader of Congress-Parliamentary Party in contest with Morarji Desai.
- Jan. 24, 1966 Sworn in as Prime Minister.
- March 25, 1966 Visit to France.
- March 28 to April 1, 1966 Visit to the United States.
- April 2, 1966 Halt in London and Moscow on way back.
- July 8-12 1966 Visit to Yugoslavia, Soviet Union and U.A.R.
- Oct. 4, 1966 Visit to Nepal
- Oct. 23, 1966 Tripartite meeting in Delhi of Presidents Tito and Nasser and Prime Minister of India.
- Jan. 1967 Campaigns for Congress in the Fourth General Election touring 15,200 miles, addressing 160 meetings.
- Feb. 23, 1967 Declared elected to Lok Sabha from Rae Bareli, U.P. (Votes secured 143,602)
- March 12, 1967 Elected unanimously as Leader of Congress Parliamentary Party.
- March 13, 1967 Sworn in as Prime Minister.
- Sept. 21, 1967 Visit to Ceylon.
- Oct. 8-21, 1967 Visit to Moscow, Poland, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria and U.A.R.
- Nov. 6-8 1967 Visit to Soviet Union for 50th Anniversary of Soviet Revolution.
- Feb. 1, 1968 Inaugurated UNCTAD-II in Delhi.
- Feb. 3-7 1968 Visit to Andamans.
- Feb. 24, 1968 Rajiv's wedding.
- May 3, 1968 Visit to Sikkim and Bhutan.
- May 19 to June 1 1968 Visit to Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.
- June 20, 1968 Meeting of reconstituted National Integration Council in Srinagar.

Sept. 21 to

Oct. 18, 1968 Visit to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Trinidad, Tobago and Guyana.

Oct. 14, 1968 Address to the U.N. General Assembly.

Jan. 1969 Attended Commonwealth PMs' Conference in London.

Continued election campaign for the mid-term poll in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and West Bengal.